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THE TALE OF A TRANSPARENT MYSTERY.

BY

GEORGE MANVILLE FENN,

AUTHOR OF "THE DARK HOUSE," ETC.

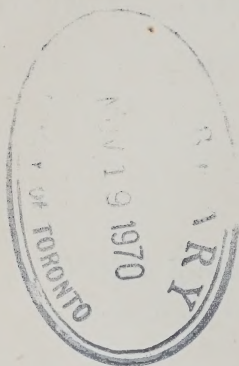
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DOUBLE CUNNING.

PROLOGUE.—The Four Quarters of the Globe.

CHAPTER I.

A SCENE IN ASIA.

"HERE, Judy, quick: come here!"

There was a low, rustling noise on the other side of an Indian-grass screen. This was pressed back; and what may be described as twofold sunshine illumined the darkened room in General Sir Robert Fanshaw's bungalow, where well-saturated mats shut out the light and admitted the cooled and moistened air.

The sunshine was of two kinds: solar and human; and, when the young girl who had made the rustling noise let fall the lightly-woven mat, the solar sunshine was cut off, but the human remained.

A fanciful way of describing the bright aspect of Judith Nesbitt; but no better way suggests itself for verbally painting a very fair girl in white, whose pure skin was untouched by the scorching sun of Malappore, whose large, grey eyes seemed to flash, and whose long, wonderfully delicate hair absolutely glittered, as if it were so much native silk—pale golden—just spun from a pile of cocoons, and delicate enough to have made her face insipid but for the dark brows and lashes, and the animated eagerness her features possessed.

"What is the matter, uncle?"

"A letter—news—Harry married—pew!"

The ruddy, bronzed old officer, whose short, silvery hair stood up fiercely all over his head, drew out a red handkerchief and excitedly dabbed his face as he passed the letter to the girl, who caught it from him, glanced at it, and then her curved lips parted to give utterance to the one interjection, "O!"

"Ah! I should think it is 'O!' Judy. Who'd have thought it? Ha! ha! ha! An old rascal! I say, hasn't he taste?"

"But, uncle, dear," came from the pouted lips, "it seems so strange. Alice is only twenty-one, and Uncle Harry——"

"Fifty-four, same as I am."

"It's so shocking!"

"Shocking be hanged, you jade! By capsicum and curry! Harry's right. The pretty witch! I'll do the same directly we get back."

"Uncle!"

"I will. Why not? Harry has. *Tlat!* What a pretty wife!"

He made the peculiar smacking noise of the tongue indicative of having tasted something good, and laughed.

"It seems impossible," said the girl, half to herself, as she stood with the unperused letter in her hand.

"What, for me to get married? By George! I'll look out the prettiest lass—in London, and—bah!—"

Sir Robert Fanshaw's speech came to a sudden end; for the girl ran behind him and laid her soft little hand upon his mouth, where it lay half-covered by the fringe of the old officer's heavy moustache.

"Don't talk nonsense, uncle, dear. I'm sure you would not do such a thing."

"Not do such a thing!" he cried, lifting the little hand, which remained ready to close his lips should he say anything obnoxious, while a union of silver and gold took place as the girl laid her head upon his fierce-looking grey hair.

"No, uncle, dear, I'm sure you would not."

"I'm sure I would. I should like just such a girl as Alice."

"Nonsense!"

"Sense!"

"It isn't."

"'Tis! What's to become of me when you're married and gone?"

"When I'm married and gone! How absurd, dear!"

"Take—away—that—hand. I want to talk. There, don't: it's a nuisance. Yes, when you've gone. I shall wait till I've got you off my hands, and then I shall—ha! ha! ha!—marry the—will you keep that hand away?"

"I will not have you talk such nonsense, uncle, when there's so serious a matter to discuss."

"Well, there: keep your hand away, and I'll talk. You haven't read the letter yet."

"No, uncle, dear. I was so taken by surprise."

"So was I; but what does it matter? Your Uncle Harry is as fine a fellow as ever stepped."

"Dear Uncle Harry! How I shall like to see him again!"

"And little Alice must have grown into as sweet a woman as a man could wish to have."

"Yes. She was very beautiful four years ago."

"And is now, of course. Well, Harry—your uncle—says he was lonely. Alice seemed everything to him, and he married her. But it's to make no difference. They're going on the Continent for a month, and will be back in time to meet us. God bless them! I hope they'll be very happy."

"So do I, uncle, dear," said the girl. "I felt surprised at first, but that has all gone now. But how droll it seems: Alice, Lady Fanshaw!"

"And when I marry there'll be two Lady Fanshaws."

"Yes, uncle, dear, when you marry!" said the girl, archly.

"Ah! you may laugh, Judy, but your Uncle Harry has settled it all for you."

"For me, uncle?"

"Yes; he says George Carleigh's regiment is ordered home from the Cape, that he has got his promotion, and that nothing would please him better than to see a match between you two. What do you think of that?"

Judith Nesbitt leaned more over her uncle's shoulder, and looked right in his face, with the colour suffusing her own.

"What do you think of it, uncle?"

"What do I think? Well, I don't know. George Carleigh will be well off. Fine, handsome young fellow! Always was! Your uncle has treated him like a son, and——"

"You don't want me to marry Captain Carleigh, uncle?"

"Well, I never said I did. I'd sooner see you take to that young Yankee chap who was here touring. I rather liked him, and—hallo! I say! Ah, Judy! Judy!"

The soft little hand was laid upon the old officer's lips again as the girl, whose cheeks had taken a deeper tint, laid one of them upon the crisp, silvery hair, and said quietly—

"I thought Mr. Range——"

"Arthur Lincoln Range; give him the full range, my dear."

"I thought him very nice and frank and gen——manly."

"Eh, what's that? You were going to say gentlemanly?"

"Yes, uncle dear, and stopped myself; but I ought not to have done so. He wanted polish; but I think he was a thorough gentleman at heart."

"I'm sure he was, Judy," said Sir Robert, warmly. "And I say, he's tremendously rich."

"I should never marry a man for his money, uncle; and what nonsense we are talking! We may never see Mr. Range again."

"I'm not so sure about that, my dear. I think he was a bit taken with you."

"Oh, nonsense, uncle! Why should you think that?"

"Because I felt so confoundedly jealous of the fellow."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!"

Judith laughed a pleasant, silvery little laugh, and both her arms tightly embraced the old officer's neck.

"What are you grinning at, you puss?"

"You said you wanted to be rid of me and get married, uncle; and, without thinking, you let it escape you that you and I are never going to part. There, I won't hear another word. Just as if it were likely that either you or I should ever marry."

"Ah, well, my darling," said the old gentleman, drawing the girl to his breast, and kissing her tenderly, "Heaven only knows what is to come! I can't live very much longer."

"Uncle! dear uncle!"

"And when the despatch comes I shouldn't dislike to see you the wife of some true man who loved you, and was as proud of you as your foolish old uncle has been."

There was a kiss here.

"No, my darling, I shall never marry, and I don't want to lose you. Harry, God bless him, I hope he'll be very happy with his young wife. Harry means well, but I never quite took to George Carleigh. I shouldn't stand in your way if you wanted him; but there, there, we won't begin discussing that. I'm not glad Harry is married—I'm not sorry. Perhaps it's right; for he had no bonnie little lint-haired lassie to abuse and bully and growl at when his liver was queer; and his must have been a solitary life."

"Yes, uncle, of course; and Alice always was a dear good girl."

"Not so pretty as my pet," said Sir Robert.

"Oh, uncle, what nonsense! Why, Alice has beautiful features."

"Let her have 'em. You'll do for me. There, the murder's out. I'm surprised—but I don't see why I should be; and, as Harry says, it won't make any difference."

"And you'll go straight down to Elmthorpe when we reach England?"

"Straight, my dear, and—er—you'll—I say; I know what you women are."

"Why, uncle, you said only yesterday that you never could understand women."

"Did I? Well, I'm a day older now, and know better. I say, I know what you women are. No snubbing pretty Alice for marrying her old guardian, Judy."

"What I, uncle, dear? Oh, absurd! I love Alice too well. The news did come as a shock; but I'm going to my room to write her a long, long letter of congratulation."

"What, hot as it is?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Ah, well! it's too hot for me to write. Man and his wife are one flesh; so, if you write to Alice, you will be writing to your uncle, too. Say everything nice you can think of. Tell him we shall be home within two months, and—I'll add a little postscript. Now, give me a light for my cigar, and I'm going to have a nap."

Pretty Judith Nesbitt lit the cigar, and then left the room, looking rather flushed and excited; while, after drawing at the roll of herb for a few minutes, the old general, who had served his country for long enough in the East, and who for the past four years had been Governor of Malaya, dropped asleep, to dream of his brother's

beautiful seat in distant Yorkshire, reaching mentally, in moments, the green park and game-haunted woods, where a few weeks hence he hoped to be.

CHAPTER II.

A SCENE IN AFRICA.

"The old idiot! The weak, contemptible old idiot!"

There was a hasty walk up and down the lightly furnished room in the officers' quarters at Cape Town. A letter held in the speaker's hand was crumpled up, and his high, sun-browned forehead was contracted into endless wrinkles and puckers.

He stopped short unconsciously before the little looking-glass, and an angry, evil-looking face was reflected therein, though he saw it not.

"And you, madam! Is this the end of our pleasant walks—of your sighs—of my—oh! it makes me half mad."

He turned round sharply, took another pace or two up and down the room, and threw himself into a long folding-chair. There he began smoothing out upon his knee the crumpled India paper, and, as if the action of his hand was reflected in his face, his brow grew also smoother, and the wrinkles disappeared from about his eyes and the corners of his mouth. The result was that, as he finished his task, and lay back lighting a cigar, previous to settling himself down to re-read the letter, there was an altered face above that broad, deep chest, and a totally different look in his dark eyes. Then there was a half-sneering laugh, and the young man went on smoking for a few minutes.

"Just as she likes," he said, mockingly. "Just as she likes. I suppose there was nothing between us—perhaps never would have been; but it does touch a fellow's *amour propre* for a girl to give the preference to that old man."

He smoked on in silence, looking straight before him out of the open window at the clear blue African sky and glaring sunshine, but seeing only the far-off English home where he had spent his boyhood and the intervals when not engaged in study for his profession; and, as he sat back there, with the thin paper covered with close, neat writing spread upon one knee, the soft breeze that came through the open window lifted one corner of the paper now and then, and ended by wafting it on to the floor, interrupting the flow of the thinker's day-dream, and making him rise with an oath to recover the missive that had reached him by the morning's mail.

"Ah, well," he muttered, "let's see what the old boy says. Perhaps I can read it more coolly now."

He went on reading slowly, with his eyes half closed, and from time to time muttered scraps aloud in a hasty comment jerked out half spitefully; but his face retained its calm.

"Glad I'm ordered home. Always to look upon it as home. Alice been my companion for so many years—[Might have known it would come to it—a jilt.] Position of both so lonely—come straight home, my dear boy—shall have returned from Continent—[Straight home—home? Never darken his door again.] Alice tells me to send her kindest love—[Pish! The jilt—the miserable flirt!]
—says you will be surprised at the news—[I was. No, I was not. Just like such a woman.] She shall welcome the hero home from the wars, and we will have plenty of music—says she will sing the old ditty, 'Rest, Warrior, rest.'—[That's a sneer—a cursed, spiteful sneer.] Find Elmhurpe the same old place; your rooms always ready—[Humph! If I go. I don't know that I shall not, if only to make her uncomfortable. What's this about Sir Robert?] Coming home at once—ceases to be Governor at Malapport—of course, Judith Nesbitt with him—must renew your acquaintance with her—sweet girl—[Bah! milk-and-water chit!] Good opportunity being together in the house—time you stirred—some young American been making trip round the world—stayed with the Governor—speaks of him a good deal. Come straight here, my dear boy. Always your affectionate guardian—[Humph!]"

George Carleigh, captain in Her Majesty's 00th Regiment of Foot, found that his cigar was out, so he lit a wax match, but, instead of applying it to the end of the roll of leaf, he slowly crumpled the letter, lit that, and used it to ignite the cigar, holding it afterwards on the point of a steel pen, till nothing but a scrap of tinder was left, and this he tossed contemptuously away.

"The old rascal!" he muttered. "Takes that step in my absence—knows I shall be put out, so he holds out Judith Nesbitt to me as a sweet sop to keep me quiet. Bah! how is it possible that old men can be such fools!"

The unpleasant, evil look came back into the young officer's face as he sat thinking.

"Will not make any difference," he muttered, quoting once more from the letter. "That remains to be seen. It is like a break-up of the old home—where I had my own way—where it always seemed that I was to be master—and Alice might have been mistress, but in a different way. Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!"

He burst into a loud, harsh laugh that possessed in its tones no more mirth than some wild shriek of pain; and then, once more, he began to pace the barely-furnished room.

"Some young American, eh? Who is he? Some confounded Yankee tradesman who has made dollars by 'striking ile,' I suppose, and who says, 'I reckon,' and 'I guess,' and 'you bet,' with a confounded drawl! Curse them! How I do hate all Yankees!"

He bit a piece off the end of his cigar and spat it from him viciously.

"The old man thinks he means Judith! Bah! what a name to give a girl! One hour she would be always suggesting that her

husband's name ought to be Punch ; another time, when one had the blues, that she was going to get up in the night, take one's sword, and cut off a fellow's head. No, hang it all, I wouldn't marry Judy Nesbitt ! I don't know though. She promised to be pretty, like a strawberry ice-cream, and she'll have all old Sir Robert's money. He won't marry. I've got to think about Elmthorpe now, and the changed state of affairs."

He smoked furiously again for a few minutes, and once more his face puckered up in an extremely unpleasant way.

"Won't make any difference to me ! Pah ! Poor old Elmthorpe ! No more waltzes with pretty Alice. It must be Judith now. Next thing will be an alteration in the dear old house—men putting up green-baize doors to the large south room—the nursery ; and there will be a perambulator on the lawn. Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !"

As he finished his harsh, discordant laugh there was a hasty step in the corridor, the clink of a sabre scabbard on the floor, a sharp rap at the door, and a slight, merry-looking young officer in undress uniform rushed into the room in the most uncereemonious manner, and glanced sharply round.

"Hallo ! Has he gone ?"

"Has who gone ?" said Carleigh, roughly.

"Him. You know. The old 'un. I heard a burst of demoniacal stage laughter as I came along the passage. I say, Carleigh, old man, what's up ?"

"Don't be a fool !"

"Can't help it," was the good-humoured reply. "But hurrah, old man ! we've got the route. The big 'Donald Currie' puts in here next week, and huzza ! we're homeward bound !"

"Next week—so soon ?"

"Yes—next week. Ta, ta ! I must tell the others."

"Next week !" said George Carleigh, as he stood alone in his quarters. "Home—make no difference—well, we shall see."

CHAPTER III.

A SCENE IN AMERICA.

"WELL, good-bye, boy. S'pose you'll write ?"

"Oh yes ! sometimes, not often ; you won't answer my letters if I do."

The first speaker chuckled or laughed in a harsh, dry way, like a hilarious cricket.

"I wrote to you last year from the Cape, from Ceylon, from Malap-pore, from Canton, and from Yokohama, and I never had a line."

"Not a single line, boy."

"Then what's the use of my writing ?"

"S'pose you're ill?"

"Oh, I shan't be ill. I shall take care of myself."

"You really mean to go then?"

"Looks like it. I must alter my mind pretty quickly if I don't."

"Well, alter it. Stop at home."

"No, I shall go. Last year's trip did me no end of good."

"Did it?"

"Yes; knocked the conceit out of me; showed me that there's something else to live for beside dollars, and that there's something for a young fellow to learn."

"Well, you've got the chance; I hadn't when I was your age. Too old to care about learning much now."

"Nonsense! Come!"

"No, boy, no. I'll work and see that all goes right for you."

"Don't fidget about me if you get no news for a long time."

"Tain't likely." Here there was a pause, and the elder speaker added, "Shall you bring back a wife?"

There was a shake of the head.

"No."

"Not the Malay gal you saw at the Governor's?"

"Nonsense! She was an English lady."

"Well, you had better look out, my boy. As soon as those European dowagers find what a strong smell of coin there is about you they'll begin to fish. Mind you're not caught. Why, boy, you might marry a Jarman princess if you liked."

"Yes, but I don't like. Look here, uncle, I mean to have a regular round, and see if I can't pick up some polish. I shall see Paris, Brussels, Vienna, Berlin, Switzerland, Rome, and London. I shall do the lakes and mountains and learn all I can. When I'm tired I shall come back."

The elder of the two speakers made a half-turn as if to go.

"Right!" he said. "Well, take care of yourself."

"I'll try."

"All your traps aboard?"

"Yes."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

There was a quick look and then a sharp nod, and the pair walked towards the gangway of the great American liner, when, as if seized by an idea, the elder exclaimed—

"Say, lad."

"Well?"

"As you are going to England, just as it is the old country, and because of what it has done, I'd see Boston Stump."

"All right! and Franklin's printing-office, and all the rest."

"But mind Boston Stump."

"Right."

The elder man screwed up his yellow face and knit his brows for a few seconds, and the younger was all attention, for he knew something else was coming.

"Look here, boy, letter-writing's a nuisance, and postage comes dear. Sometimes letters get lost, sometimes they're drowned. You needn't bother to write."

"I will not."

"I shall expect to see you back within a year, and if you don't turn up then I shall come and look for you."

"I wish you would."

"There ain't nothing likely to happen to you, is there?"

"Happen? No. If I could go all round the world safely, surely I can run over to Europe and back."

"I dunno so much about that. Joe Garstin drove the express wagon for forty year right across the wide perarer, and never come to harm. One day he thought he'd ride Frankling B. Reek's pony to Concord and back, eight mile, and he come off and broke his neck."

"I hope I shall have better luck, uncle."

"So do I. Well, if I don't hear of you by this time next year, I shall come after you."

"That's right. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

They parted at the gangway, and, as the elder man stepped ashore, he said to himself—

"Dessay he'll be all right. They'll be sharp ones who get over Arthur Lincoln Range."

At the same time the younger was saying—

"The old fellow needn't be afraid, he has ground me up too sharp. Well, I'm glad I'm going, it pays me, if only by showing me a bit of the old boy's other side. I didn't think he cared for me so much."

The deck of the great steamship was crowded with passengers and their friends—with luggage, porters, and the busy crew, while scores of people with and without business helped to cumber the way. Of these, there were two standing together, apparently as ordinary spectators of the busy scene, but really very watchful of what was going on.

One was a tall, bluff, fresh-countenanced, clerical gentleman of about forty, in spotless black, his great brown beard almost entirely hiding his white cravat and cassock-vest. The other was a sharp, keen, intelligent man, of about the same age, equally well dressed, and incessantly fidgeting a thin umbrella about in his black-gloved hands. He looked like a doctor or a lawyer, probably the latter, for his upper lip and chin were closely shaven, as if out of deference to clients of a conservative nature, though at the next glance you might have said, "He is a doctor. Those whiskers have the genuine medical cut."

They were watching the two speakers intently, for the medical-looking man had just said—

"Now look here, Shell, are you sure you're right? We've no money to fool away."

"Right? Of course I am. That's old Wash Range, that tall, gaunt, yellow-faced old chap with not a bit of hair on his phiz—there, just by the sky-light."

"Ye—es. I see the man you mean."

"And that's his nephew, Arthur Lincoln Range, that well-built, good-looking young fellow with the dandy moustache."

"What, that fair fellow with the close curly hair, in the brownish tweeds?"

"That's the lad."

"But are you sure?"

"I tell you I've seen the passenger-list. There's his name down in full: passenger to Queenstown, Ireland."

"But that proves nothing."

"Proves nothing? Why, it proves that he has taken his passage. And I tell you I'm sure that's our man."

"But suppose it isn't our man?"

"But it is. And, if it were not, there's his name down as passenger, and he is sure to be aboard."

"Ah, that's it! Perhaps he isn't. A fellow like that, with millions upon millions of dollars, would think nothing of forfeiting a trifle of passage-money. He'd be as whimsical as a girl. They say he is."

"So should I be if I had a copper-mine of my own."

"Suppose, then, we take all our steps, sink no end of capital, and find that at the last moment he did not go?"

"Would be awkward, Nathan. But I tell you I'm sure. I've watched carefully, and I know."

"But you might make a mistake, Shell, and it would be such a waste of time and money."

"And of a great chance, too, Nathan the careful. Well, look here!"

He turned sharply to one of the officers.

"Can you tell me whether that fair, good-looking young Englishman is Mr. Edwins, the actor?"

"What, that, sir?—that gentleman in brown, talking to the smooth-faced, gaunt old man?"

"Yes—that is he, is it not?"

"Oh, dear, no! That is Mr. Arthur Lincoln Range, of Red Creek Copper Lode—one of the richest men in the States, sir. The old chap he's talking to is old Washington Range. Poor prospector once after gold, and dropped by accident on the copper."

"Copper, eh?"

"Yes, sir, looking for gold with his mate, and found the copper in an out-of-the-way rocky gulch, just when they were about worn-

out and starving. Mate said it might do for Range, but wouldn't do for him. He wanted gold in five-dollar pieces, and not cents. Old Range said he'd be content with cents, and he should take the claim; and he did. He made an immense fortune out of it, and turned it over to his nephew, who has made two. Old man don't look worth a cent, does he? Right! Here, boys!"

The officer turned away rapidly to give some orders, and the clerical and medical-looking man exchanged glances.

"Hah!" said the former, "he looks as keen as a razor. I'm glad he's not going too."

"Why?"

"Because I've my doubts about him. When you've been, as they call it, making war upon society for a few years, Nathan, you get to understand your adversaries' fence, and there are some people with whom you don't care to engage."

"You think, then, if he had been going we should fail."

"Fail! no. What does that fellow say in Richelieu about the lexicon, you know?"

"What, the dictionary?"

"No, no, no! Something about in the lexicon of youth there being no such word as fail. We'll do it, Nathan; we'll do it!"

"But, look here, Shell," said the medical man, "I like to be cautious. Jack Pannell's rather too clever sometimes, and Sarah—well, you know what women are! Suppose we get nearly up to success point and then she upsets it all?"

"Have a little more trust in your partners, man. But what are you thinking about, now?"

"Wouldn't it be better to fight on our own ground here at home, instead of giving battle in a foreign land where everything is strange?"

"Fight what? Fight whom?"

"The old boy, yonder. He's as good game as the young one. Isn't it worth the trial? There'd be no crossing the seas then; no laying out a lot of capital before we got any return."

"Pish, man! don't be so sordid and so cowardly. Don't I tell you that this golden boy shall pay all our costs for us, and give us what we want. Have you no confidence in my plans?"

"Oh, yes, plenty; but if we could crack this old fellow without going on a wild-geese chase to Europe——"

"Tame-geese chase, Nathan—tame-geese."

"But the risk, man—the risk of the foreign police."

"Now, my dear Nathan, why all these obstacles at five minutes before the twelfth hour? If we have no more brains than a set of fellows who are paid five dollars or two pound a week, we had better give up, and not fire at either short range or long range; but I think we have more."

"Yes, yes, of course; but I don't like losing money."

"You shall not lose money. Have a little faith in me."

"Yes, Shell, I have. But ought we to be quite satisfied now? It's a great risk."

"Satisfied? Yes. That's the pair. Don't look as if they could buy up half a State, do they?"

"No," said the other, with a curious smile; "and it don't seem right that one man should hold so much, does it? But, if we are satisfied, don't let's lose our chance. Now, then, what next?"

"Next?" said the clerical-looking man, in a low, firm voice. "Next? Just this. We'll keep him in sight till we are obliged to go ashore. We shall know then that he has sailed. Then there is the telegraph."

"Ah! but the cost?"

"Cost! Bah! What are twenty or thirty pounds if they are the seeds to grow into thousands? Hang it, Nathan, have some pluck!"

"Yes, I will; but—well, well, go on."

"We telegraph to Jack Pannell and the idol fair to be on the look-out."

"But a letter would do it better."

"A letter, man? Nonsense! we must play high. The stakes are princely. We telegraph at once. Jack Pannell will be on the look-out and begin the game. We follow in the next boat."

"And see that Pannell does it all right. Help him, you know."

"Nathan Mewburn," said the clerical-looking man, standing with his eyes fixed upon the young millionaire talking in happy ignorance to his dry old relative a few yards away—"Nathan Mewburn, we are a party of four in this great spec. All of us will work, but only one can be boss. I'm going to be captain here, and you've got to obey."

"But, Shell."

"To obey, I say," repeated the clerical-looking man in a deep, fierce voice, though his face was unruffled and bland. "Do you hear? I say obey, or as sure as my name's Frank Sheldrake I'll——"

"Hist! some one will hear you," whispered Mewburn, with a scared look round.

Just then the safety-valves, which had been angrily snorting for some time, began to give forth a piercing, continuous scream, a bell clanged loudly, and a stentorian voice roared out—

"Now, then, all for the shore!"

CHAPTER IV.

A SCENE IN EUROPE.

"WHO are those people, waiter?"

The white-aproned attendant gave his napkin a whisk, as if removing dust, and turned an inquiring look upon the dapper little

French gentleman who was looking at him over the top of the *Figaro*, which he held so as to screen himself.

"Those people, sir?"

"Yes; the gentleman and lady—the foreigners at breakfast?"

"Ah, yes! I comprehend, sir. Those are people greatly distinguished. The gentleman is the Baron von Stadtensfels, and the lady the Baroness,—friends of that great enemy of our nation, Beece-marque."

"No, no, not those gross Dutch. The others—the tall, stout, fair man, and the fashionably-dressed lady."

"Aha! I comprehend. Monsieur means les Américains. They breakfast here each morning. They stay at the Hôtel Bristol. A rich American gentleman, they say, and his sister."

"Sister?"

"Ah, yes! But, my faith, I cannot tell. The people American when they travel are so droll. Monsieur breakfasts here?"

"Yes."

The waiter took his orders and departed, leaving the dapper little Frenchman—whose get-up and red ribbon suggested that he was, or believed himself to be, a man of some importance—sitting ostensibly reading the French journal, but really watching the couple concerning whom he had been catechising the waiter.

The couple in question were evidently making a hearty meal, of the kind that the French call breakfast, but which, as it is eaten at noon, our unfashionable fathers would have called dinner.

The lady, a fine, handsome-looking woman of any age between twenty-five and thirty-five, was extravagantly dressed in the height of fashion. The gentleman—a bluff, fair, stalwart-looking fellow, who was more English than American of aspect—was evidently very hungry, but at the same time mentally exercised for fear anything should happen to his beard.

For while he had his fair crisp hair cut quite short about the temples—a fashion that his broad brow and good, manly, frank countenance favoured—his beard, which was of a deep golden brown, had been allowed to grow to a tremendous length, and to the care of this it was evident that he gave a good deal of his mind.

Early in the meal, a drop of the thick unctuous soup fell amongst the crisp strands, and had to be very carefully removed. Later on, a little of the good claret he was drinking dripped from the over-filled glass, and, to the owner's great disgust, moistened his favourite growth; while soon after a flippant, pale-brown scrap of crust flew from the yard-long loaf of French bread as a section was being cut off, darted into the beard, which it treated as a labyrinth, and dodged about here and there for some moments before it could be hunted out.

"I wish you would think a little more about business and not so much about your beard, Jack," said the lady, impatiently, after watching her companion with a half-contemptuous look. "You're always fooling about with it, you are indeed."

"Am I? Who took two hours to dress this morning?"

"I'm obliged to pay attention to my toilette, am I not?"

"Don't bother. Have another of these cutlets; they're first-rate."

"No, no! Now about this telegram?"

"Hang the telegram! I'm at breakfast. One thing at a time. I wonder what there is in this sauce. It's prime."

"Pish! What a glutton you do get! Now tell me what's to be done first?"

"Finish breakfast, and then I'll talk."

"About our plans?"

"No; I'm going to have a chat with the little Count. He's sitting scowling there behind the *Figaro*. He's hipped about what he lost last night. I must give him his revenge."

"You must do nothing of the kind, Jack, but begin settling the campaign."

"Plenty of time. He can't be here yet for eight or nine days. I wish you wouldn't bother so. An engine won't work without coal."

"Tut—tut—tut! But tell me, what sort of a fellow is he?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the gourmand. "Yes, I do. Young, good-looking, green; thinks himself a Solomon. Don't bother, girl. There'll be no difficulty about it. We shall know directly he comes."

The lady darted an impatient look at her companion from her bold, handsome eyes, and crossing her hands in her lap sat back in her chair waiting till the meal was at an end, and then uttered a sigh of content.

"Going?" she said, for the Hercules, apparently satiated, drank the last glass of wine, rose, flipped a few crumbs from his vest, and thrust back his chair.

"Only to have a *parole* with the Count, and offer him his *revanche*, as he'd call it."

"No, no, come away! I want to telegraph to Sheldrake."

"What's the good? They're at sea now."

"Well, then, to write a long letter for them to get at Queenstown when the *Hudson* arrives. Come away now."

"Shan't!"

"Oh, you're too bad, Jack."

The great fellow took no notice, but, after the fashion of one Astur immortalised by Macaulay, went with his stately stride across to where the little French gentleman was now partaking of his soup, and favoured him with a hearty clap on the shoulder.

"Well, Count!" he cried, heartily.

The spoon dropped with a clatter back into the plate, the chair was thrust violently back, the napkin which had been tucked French fashion over shirt-front and vest was torn off, and, looking like a modern David of Gallic extraction facing a fashionably clothed Philistine, the little Frenchman exclaimed—

"Monsieur!"

That is only a word of two syllables, and we know it means *sir*; but to hear it snapped out by an irate Frenchman is to have more

impression made upon your senses than is produced by the long speeches of some of our greatest, or so-called greatest, orators.

"Why, hallo, what's the matter with you?"

"Vous m'avez trompé! Vous——"

"Trumped you! Of course. Fellows who play cards do get trumped. Don't make a fuss about a few francs."

"Vous m'avez triché. Filou!"

"Look here, Count, I don't understand your confounded language. If you want to quarrel——"

"To quarr—relle!" half shrieked the little Frenchman. "You are scoundraille—eemposetairre. Filou!"

As he spoke he struck the young American across the face with the napkin he held in his hand.

The great fellow's face was purple with rage in an instant, and, catching the slight little Frenchman by one arm, and his garments about the hips, he literally lifted him from the floor.

What would have followed it is impossible to say, but just then the well-dressed woman, his companion, caught the great fellow by the arm, and whispered something in his ear.

"All right!" he growled; and, loosing his hold, the little Frenchman was dropped upon the carpet, and slunk away to begin chattering and gesticulating to the group of guests and waiters who had hurriedly gathered round.

"Come away quickly," said the woman. "Pay the bill."

"Oh, all right! Here, garçon, my bill!"

This was waiting, and, paying hastily, the great fellow moved slowly and in rather a swaggering way towards the door, his companion holding tightly by his arm.

"Why, I could eat him like snipe on toast," he growled.

"Yes, yes, but come away now."

They were not to leave without a fresh encounter, for, as they reached the door, a gentlemanly-looking man, who had hurriedly left the group, came up.

"Monsieur is staying?" he said.

"No, I'm not; I'm going," cried the American, whose polish was rapidly leaving him in his angry fit. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Madame will excuse?" said the Frenchman, raising his hat apologetically. "Sir, you will give me your card."

"Haven't one with me. I'm at the Hôtel Bristol if you want me. Here, Sarah, come along."

The couple left the great restaurant, and before they had gone fifty yards the lady signalled with her creamy lace parasol to a passing street-carriage, and gave orders for them to be taken at once to their hotel.

"A little fool!" growled the great fellow.

"Some one else must have been the fool," said the lady, sharply. "How clumsy you were!"

"Perhaps I was," said the man, sulkily. "What are you going to do? Here, I'm not going to fight that Frenchman his fashion, and have a hole made in me."

"Don't be afraid," said the lady, scornfully. "He will fight you with the police. We must be off at once. How could you be so idiotic, and at a time like this? If you had left him alone all would have been well."

"No use crying over spilt milk. Well, what's to be done?"

"Sheldrake will be furious, but there's no help for it. We must go on to Homburg. Our friend is sure to come there."

"Humph! 'tis a pity," said the great fellow, whose anger had now evaporated. "Think Homburg will be best?"

"I don't know. It will do. We are sure to meet him there, or at Baden, or Monaco."

"Then you'll go at once?"

"Would you stop here and have everybody pointing at you as a sharper?"

"Humph! No."

"Then we must be off at once. Your blundering has made a mess of our proceedings at the very outset."

"I'm very sorry, old girl," said the great fellow, remorsefully.

"Sorry! what's the good of that? If you would be guided entirely by me, such things as this would not happen. Here we are!"

The couple dismounted, paid their driver, and half an hour later they had settled their hotel bill, and went on their way to the station to take tickets for one of the haunts of play and pleasure farther east, Paris not being a convenient field after the troubles of the morning and the previous night.

(End of Prologue.)

THE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

FIRST TRIAL THREADS.

THREE months soon glide by in seeing sights on the Continent. Arthur Range, during twelve busy weeks, had seen Paris in all its phases, grown tired of its light gaiety, run south to Marseilles, visited the Pyrenees, peeped into Spain, grown more tired; and then, as is the custom with weary flies, flown straight for the web that had been spun by the ingenious spiders who were devoting themselves to the task of obtaining a large share of the huge fortune of which he was possessed.

He had displayed no ostentation, made no boast during his stay at the various hotels; and, if there were any rumours afloat regarding his being an American millionaire, they did not come from him.

After visiting so many lions, Salzbingen—with its mineral springs, pretty hotels with arbour-dotted gardens, charming *tables-d'hôte*, bands of music, promenades, and the pleasant *al fresco* life amongst the mountains and pine-forests—was delightfully refreshing.

He never was better in his life; but he followed the fashion: consulted one of the resident medical men, took the baths for tonic purposes, drank a great deal of some very nasty water, and this, if it did nothing else, kept down a certain amount of fever that might have supervened consequent upon a good deal of high play that was going on at the various *salles*.

Perhaps, too, it kept down another fever that threatened—a fire that is lit by bright eyes; for how it came about Arthur Range did not exactly know, only that all at once he found himself on very friendly terms with a Mr. John Pannell, a great bluff American, who was travelling with his sister to see a little of the world.

At first Range had shrunk from the intimacy; but as it was not forced upon him, and he was daily meeting the brother and sister at the same hotel, he grew less icy in his manner.

If he went to drink the waters he was sure to see Miss Pannell, dressed in the most tasteful of French costumes, and looking very handsome, ready with her cup of the nauseous fluid.

"She certainly is a very beautiful woman," he would say, and then, in spite of himself, he felt a little annoyed, for the lady hurriedly finished and walked away.

The sixth or seventh time, when, on the strength of his having eaten at the same *table-d'hôte*, Range raised his hat, his bow was very coldly acknowledged, and once more the lady walked quickly away.

"Proud enough to be an Englishwoman, with blood as blue as indigo," Range said sharply, and he felt a little more piqued.

The same plan was being carried out by the big, bluff American.

Go where Range would he was sure to run up against John Pannell, either walking and reading a guide-book, or else seated at the foot of some fir-tree, smoking a tremendous meerschaum pipe.

Pannell made not the slightest advance, and upon one occasion, when asked for a light, he gave it in a sour, half-sulky way.

"They can't be Americans," said Range to himself, when, encountering these people so frequently, he found himself thinking about them, in spite of a floating thought that they were nothing to him. "They must be English and—— Pish! what an idiot I am! Why should I think about them as I do?"

It was a glorious morning, and Range was having a good stretching walk up the side of one of the mountains, where the faint track

wound in and out amongst the great columnar pines, in whose tops the wind whispered like the faintly-heard roar of the sea.

Every here and there the great black-hued firs ceased, and the traveller stepped out into the open, from shade to brilliant sunshine, where, far away beneath his feet, some rushing stream struggled on, flashing and glistening in the sunny valley like so much liquid silver in the morning light.

Then there would be another plunge into darkness, and it would seem as if the traveller were in some grand temple whose roof was supported by thousands of columns of ruddy bronze.

Out again into the sunshine to gaze from quite a rocky shelf on the mountain side down into valley and winding dell, and forwards and upwards at heaped-up mountain and long range of pine-forest, rock, and misty distance of a purply blue.

"Yes, this is the right path," said Range to himself. "I'm glad I asked the *kellner* last night. It's about the finest bit I've seen since I've been in these parts."

The air was delicious, making his blood thrill through his veins, and he strode on with a joyous feeling in his heart that seemed to say that he might climb on for hours without being fatigued.

"It's glorious!" he said to himself, after stopping to light a cigar; "and the beauty of it is that none of the water-drinking, promenading, brass-band-admiring people come up here. Let me see, what did the *kellner* say? 'Where the path divided, take the faint, half-seen track to the right; the views are best.'"

He paused and looked about him.

"Yes, that's it," he exclaimed, "the half-seen track over the rock and turf. Why, it's almost as good as being at home—it's so wild and lonely! Not a tourist to be seen! I'll bet anything I don't see a soul! Wonder whether England's anything like this! I could just enjoy having a house nestled in that hollow, with the pine-forest and mountain above it and that silvery waterfall below. What a view! What a—— Hullo, there's something wrong!"

He walked sharply on for some three or four hundred yards, and where the path had entered upon a rugged, picturesque curve round a buttress of the mountain he could see the figure of a man waving a handkerchief, and just beside him, plainly seen through the wondrously clear atmosphere, a lady, half reclining on the short, crisp turf.

"Why, it's the big American fellow and his sister," muttered Range, as he drew nearer. "What's the matter? Is she hurt?"

A minute later he was within speaking distance, and saw the lady rise to a sitting position, holding a bottle of salts to her nose as she half turned away her head.

"Don't think me rude," said the big American, in an abrupt manner, that really did sound rude; "thought I'd hail you. Out for a walk here. Sister slipped. Hurt her ankle. Can't walk. My sister. Sarah, gentleman staying at the Hofhaus."

There was a quick exchange of bows, and the lady coloured a little, and looked down.

"Oh, don't call it rude," cried Range, eagerly. "I'm very sorry. I hope it is nothing serious. What can I do to help you?"

"Oh, thank you so much!" said the lady, in a very soft, rich voice. "My brother is making too great a trouble of it. I shall be better soon."

"Don't talk nonsense," said the big American, sharply. "I know what a sprain is. You've hurt your ankle a great deal. You see we can't get a carriage up here, and as to the donkeys, Sarah——"

"Oh, John dear, pray!" cried the lady, with a look of horror.

"It would be better if you will allow me," said Range, "to get two or three strong fellows with poles and a light cane chair."

"Hah! like a Guy Fawkes," cried the big American. "Thank you, that's the idea."

"My dear John!" cried the lady, colouring with mortification, "there is no need. I will not: I could not bear so much unnecessary trouble. I am better now. The faintness has gone. I can walk—with your arm."

"Oh, you'd better be carried."

"No, no! Really, John, dear, I beg of you."

"Oh, well, just as you like, only don't blame me."

"Blame you, dear? No," said the lady, sweetly, "I'm much better now. The piece of stone turned as I put my foot upon it. Give me your arm, dear. There! It doesn't hurt very much. I—ah!"

She had risen to her feet with her brother's help, but reeled directly, and as Range darted forward she caught at his arm.

"Oh, how foolish and weak I am!" she exclaimed. "It was only a little pang. I'm sure I can walk now."

"Perhaps you could manage better if you rested on my arm as well?" said Range.

"Oh! I could not think of troubling you," she cried.

"It is no trouble to help any lady in such a position," said Range, gravely.

"But it's like making a pair of crutches of us, Sarah," said the American. Then to Range: "It's awfully kind of you."

"Oh, don't name it pray! And I think I'm helping friends from the West?"

"Yes; we're from Baltimore," said Pannell, as they walked slowly back, the lady leaning heavily upon the two strong arms, and getting on pretty well. "Let me see, I did hear that you were from the North."

"Yes, from Colorado."

"Sarah, we ought to beg Mr.—Ranche, isn't your name?"

"Range—Arthur Lincoln Range."

"Oh, ah! Range. We ought to beg Mr. Range's pardon. I'm afraid, sir, we've given you a good deal of cold shoulder."

"Well," said Range, smiling, "as fellow-country-folk among strangers, we neither of us seem to have made many advances."

"No, we haven't. You've kept yourself to yourself, and I've kept myself to myself. I didn't know anything about you, and you didn't know anything about me, and did not want to, I'll swear."

"Oh, I don't know," said Range, smiling; "one doesn't want to be too exclusive abroad."

"To be sure: you're right, quite right; but the fact is, Mr. Range——"

"Range, John," said the lady, softly.

"Of course: Range. I say the fact is, Mr. Range, there are so many deadheads and scamps and rascally foreign sharpers out here, and I've twice now been so bitten, that I said to Sarah here—my sister, you know—we'll just do our bit of travel to ourselves. Well," he cried, "and that's all. She thinks just as I do."

The lady bowed, and smiled, faintly.

"I don't want a set of poor penniless German or French fellows hanging about after her, sir."

"John, dear, pray say no more now."

"All right, sis. I don't want to talk. How's the foot?"

"I think it's getting better. It hurts me; but it is easier. I don't think we need trouble Mr. Range any more."

Range insisted, of course, that it was no trouble, and the consequence was that he stayed as one of the lady's supporters all the way down the mountain-side, and that walk took a long time.

The lady wished to press on, but her brother insisted upon a good rest every few hundred yards.

Then they made a long halt by a little trickling fall of cold mountain water, and, while the lady sipped the clear fluid from the flask-cup her brother carried, he and Range tempered theirs with cognac, and smoked cigars.

It was astonishing how sociable a sprained ankle made the trio, and when at last the level road was reached, and a seat found where a messenger could be sent for a carriage, Arthur Range felt as if he had been intimate with these people ever since he had seen them first; and from that hour he found himself sitting after dinner with John Pannell, sipping coffee—perhaps once in a way in company with his sister, who was very sweet and pleasant, but always rather reserved.

Result:—

One morning Arthur Range said to himself, "I meant to have left this place a fortnight ago. Well, I shan't go yet."

CHAPTER II.

HANGING IN THE NET.

It was very pleasant sitting under the trees on the hotel terrace, or in one of the arbours of the bosky garden, listening to the band at a distance, and watching the twinkling lights amongst the thick foliage.

Arthur Range was rather fond of sitting in an evening out here, and when he did so somehow the lights always suggested to him the twinkling and flashing of the fireflies down by the river, a short distance from the Governor's garden at Malaypore.

Then, naturally enough, he would think of the occupants of that garden on the soft, warm tropic nights—the fierce, grey, ruddy General, and his constant companion—fair, English-looking Judith Nesbitt.

“Ah, those were pleasant nights too,” Arthur Range used to say; “but I don’t suppose I shall ever see her again, and, if I do, it will be with some young polished English officer—wife, or engaged. That was a long time ago, a very long way off, and—hallo! here are the Pannells.”

This occurred several times; and though Arthur Range told himself that he was not a marrying man, and though, to do him justice, the position was invariably unsought, matters would happen like this:—

John Pannell would saunter up to the table where Range was seated, place a chair for his sister, and sit down too.

Then there would be a chat, during which John Pannell would seem rather restless. After a while he would say suddenly—

“I say, Range, old fellow, are you going to sit here a bit?”

“Yes.”

“Would you mind seeing my sister back to the ladies’ room if I’m not here in time?”

“Where are you going, John dear?” the lady would say.

“Oh, just to have a look in upon them at the *salle*.”

“But you won’t play, dear?”

“Who, I? Now, is it likely?”

Then the great fellow would stroll away, leaving Range and his sister together to converse for a while, till the lady said that the evening was growing chilly, and then her companion would escort her back to the hotel.

This pantomime went on evening after evening, till it had ceased to seem peculiar to Arthur Range. His lady companion was not very refined, but he had not had sufficient experience of high-class life to be a judge, and he found her society very agreeable; and, if her hand did rest a little more heavily upon his arm as he escorted her back, it only seemed natural. She knew him better, and both brother and sister treated him as a friend.

One deliciously warm evening the regular form had been gone through, and John Pannell had strolled off to the tables, leaving his sister and Range in a retired part of the hotel garden.

There was a special *fête* that night at another hotel, and consequently the gardens at the Hofhaus were almost empty, and the Herr proprietor had economised the lighting-up. It was cloudy, too, and as Range and his companion sat together his thoughts were once more away at Malaypore, and suggested to him, in the heat

and darkness of the evening, that this was Judith Nesbitt seated very near him, and the old gentleman asleep in a chair in an arbour, with a tasselled smoking-cap just dimly seen, was Sir Robert Fanshaw.

The spell was broken by his companion bending forward after a long silence and saying, in her soft, musical voice, as she laid her hand upon his arm—

“Mr. Range!”

He started slightly, and his thoughts came back to Salzbingen.

“Yes,” he said, smiling, “I am listening.”

“Mr. Range,” she said again, and her voice was rather husky, “I am in great trouble. Can you help me?”

“Help you?” he said.

“Yes. I ought not, perhaps, to speak to you, a stranger, but you have been so kind to me and my brother, and we are so much alone among foreigners, that I thought I would risk your anger and confide in you.”

“My anger?” he said.

“Yes, because you may think I ought not to have spoken. You have heard me speak to my brother night after night?”

“What, about going to the tables?”

“Yes, yes!” she cried eagerly. “Oh, I hope—I hope you do not play.”

“Well,” he said, laughing, “very little. I have lost a few florins there now and then.”

“Oh, how sad! And my brother? He has not asked you to play with him at cards?”

“To be honest, no, I don’t think he ever has. We have played.”

“Oh, Mr. Range!”

“Well, it was not his fault,” he said, laughingly; “and I’m afraid I asked him to play with me.”

“Mr. Range! and he is so weak in that way. And you have been winning his money?”

“Not guilty, fair judge,” said Range, laughingly. “He has been winning mine.”

“How much?” she cried, eagerly. “You must let me pay it back.”

“Debts at cards are considered debts of honour, I believe,” said Range, warmly; “and matters connected with play should, I think, be matters of confidence; but, at any rate, I would not let you restore the trifle I have lost, and I am sure your brother would not like you even to offer it.”

“No, he would not. John is so frank and chivalrous; but all this distresses me terribly, Mr. Range. I have such a horror of gambling. I wanted to ask you to help me coax my brother away from these tables, and you have confessed to me that you too play. It distresses me more than I can say.”

There was a sob here, and Range saw, dimly enough, a handkerchief applied to his companion’s eyes.

"You are distressing yourself, and I think without reason," he said, speaking in a low, earnest voice. "I don't think your brother is losing money."

"You don't know, you don't know," she sobbed. "It is so dreadful to be alone, as it were, here, away from all our friends, and my brother yielding, I am sure, to the temptations spread about in the shape of gaming-tables."

"But he seems shrewd and clever. He would not do anything foolish."

"I—I don't like to—to speak about my brother to one who is almost a stranger."

"Pray don't treat me as a stranger," said Range, warmly. "I have known you a little while, and you must remember that I am a fellow-countryman."

"Yes, yes," sighed the lady, "I do think of that. I could not otherwise have spoken to you in such a way as this."

There was a momentary silence, and Range felt his position.

"There, there," he said, "I don't think you have any reason to fret about your brother."

"You—you don't know," she sighed.

"Oh, yes, I do," said Range. "He likes, perhaps, to go to the tables, as I have done, to win a louis or two, for the sake of seeing how people win and lose. If you were to ask him not to play, I feel sure he would yield. I would in a moment," he added, laughingly.

"You would?" she said, dreamily. "You would—if I asked you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then pray—pray promise me—for your own sake. Gaming is so terrible!"

"To a woman, say," cried Range, playfully. "We men do not think it so horrible."

"No, no," she said, with a bitter sigh. "You do not feel it as we do. When we were in Paris—but I ought not to speak of it, indeed."

"Oh, I don't know," said Range, for want of something better to say.

"But you will not play any more?" she said, eagerly.

"If you wish me not to play. There, I promise you," he said.

"Then I will tell you," she said, excitedly. "When we were in Paris, John played a great deal and lost; and now he is taking to it again, and it may mean trouble. He had a quarrel in Paris with a French count who cheated him."

"Well, then, we must wean him from it, Miss Pannell. I'm sure if you appeal to him he will give it up."

"I don't know," she sobbed, "and I have no one to fly to for counsel. I spoke to him yesterday, and again to-day, and he repulsed me angrily. Mr. Range, I have no friends to help me here. Do, do pray try and turn him from this terrible attraction. You are so

wise and clever, and I am only a helpless woman, and—and—oh, what shall I do?"

She bent down lower and lower, till her face rested on her hands, and Range could tell that she was weeping bitterly.

It was an awkward position, but his sympathies were aroused, and kindly and gently he whispered a few words of comfort.

"You are exaggerating the trouble," he said. "You are, as I told you, making it, as tender-hearted women will, worse than it is. Pray, pray don't weep; it pains me; and—there, there, I promise you I'll do all I can to watch over your brother."

"You will, Mr. Range?" she said, half hysterically, and, raising her face suddenly, she caught his hands in hers. "You will? Ah! how can I ever thank you for all this?"

Just then there was a step on the grass, and a great dark figure loomed up at their side.

CHAPTER III.

NOT WHAT HE EXPECTED.

JOHN PANSELL always looked big; seen in the gloom of that night he appeared gigantic.

His sister started back into her seat as if overwhelmed. Arthur Range felt really confused and annoyed, the more so that there seemed to be a change in Pannell's tone as he said—

"Thought I'd come back to-night. Getting damp. Hadn't you better go in, Sarah? Coming to have a cigar, Range?"

They were very simple words, but each of the parties addressed took them as a command, and, rising, they walked slowly up to the hotel with Pannell, scarcely a remark being made.

"I suppose I'm to be asked what my intentions are towards the lady," thought Range, biting his lips angrily. "Confound it all! what hysterical creatures women are. Well, I shall speak out."

By this time they had reached the great portico, where a few of the visitors were seated about, like glow-worms, each with a bright spark of light visible about the lips, from which a faint vapour now and then arose.

Here John Pannell stopped, and his sister turned to Range, holding out her hand.

"I shall not see you again to-night," she said, in a subdued voice.

"Why does she speak to me like that before her brother and these people," thought Range, angrily, as he took the extended hand, to receive an unmistakable pressure in answer to his own honest grip.

"Humph! Poor thing! She means it as a reminder to me about her brother," he added; and then they stood together, watching the tall graceful figure cross the well-lit hall towards the grand staircase, where the lady turned for a moment to look back towards the entrance, and then passed out of their sight.

"Now for it," thought Range, drawing a long breath as his big companion laid a hand familiarly upon his shoulder.

"Care to come across to the board of green cloth?" said Pannell.

Range gave a sigh of relief, and his late companion's prayer came back.

"No, no; not to-night," he said hastily.

"Oh, very well. Let's go in here and have a cigar."

"In here" was a special room in the hotel where cigars were smoked, and coffee and stronger drinks sipped; where large, heavily-made dominoes clicked upon marble tables, and a couple here and there could be seen at cards.

Every moment, as Range met Pannell's eye, he expected to hear some allusion to the scene in the garden, but nothing was said; and, though the great fellow seemed to look at him rather searchingly, his next words were—

"Have a hand at cards?"

It may have been from mere cowardice, but those words had with them a wonderful sense of relief, and there was something ridiculously boyish in Range's after-thought as he said to himself after accepting the challenge—

"It will keep him out of mischief if his sister's ideas are right."

Arthur Range lay awake for some hours that night, weary in his mind, but without any suspicion. He was a hundred pounds poorer than when he entered the card-room, but that troubled him very little. He was satisfied from the evening's experience that Miss Pannell was right, and that her brother had a strong liking for gambling; and this too convinced him that the lady's rather demonstrative behaviour was the result of emotion, and that after all she had only appealed to him as a friend.

He was satisfied on that point, but uneasy upon another.

Was he confident about himself?

CHAPTER IV.

A DECLARATION.

ANOTHER fortnight glided by, and Arthur Range lingered in the pleasant watering-place. He played occasionally with Pannell, and sometimes won; but the balance of success against him was rather heavy.

He did not mind, however, for he kept Pannell from the dangerous green-clothed tables; and, somehow, life seemed to be gliding along very pleasantly, with the memory of Judith Nesbitt growing more faint as the name of Sarah Pannell became more fixed in his thoughts.

For the past few days he had been anxious, expecting, as he did, some demand for an explanation from the big brother; but it did not come, and a habit began to grow upon Arthur Range. Instead

of taking long walks in the pine-woods, and on the mountain-side, or drives to the more distant portions of the country, he found himself strongly affecting one of the dense arbours in the great hotel grounds, where he could sit and dream, and think about the tall, dark, graceful woman whose eyes always seemed to light up and voice grow softer when he approached.

One day he went so far as to ask himself whether he was falling in love, and then he laughed, said it was ridiculous, and for the remainder of that day he could think of nothing but his former voyage, and a soft, fair face, with quite a halo of silky, golden hair, in which the sunlight seemed to play.

That night Arthur Range went to his rest feeling more content than he had for days.

"It's all nonsense," he said. "I'm not going to get into any entanglement of the sort. I've been here too long. I'll go."

His sleep was wonderfully refreshing that night. Perhaps it was because he left his window open, and the cool breezes, laden with the resinous odours of the pine, floated in.

At all events, he rose the next morning feeling as if he had shaken off a lethargy, and met his friends at breakfast, ready to make the announcement to them that he was going to leave next day.

Somehow he did not speak then. If asked why, he would have scorned to own that he shrank from speaking before John Pannell; but at all events he put it off.

"I am under no obligation to them," he said to himself, as he went to his favourite arbour for a smoke, when the Pannells had retired to write letters. "He has won about five hundred pounds of me, and he's welcome to it. I can afford it," he added, with a grim smile; "and as for Miss Pannell, she doesn't care for me; I don't care for her; and I wish I had run away before from this lotus-eating, waltz-dancing, enervating place."

He felt all that day as if he would like to quietly pay his bill and go; but it would seem so rude to people with whom he had been on friendly terms.

The day passed, dinner-time came, and with it opportunities for making the announcement of his departure; but he still kept it back, from some uneasy sense that the parting would be unpleasant.

"I wish it were over," he said to himself, in a vexed manner. "Bah! what a mountain I am making of a mole-hill!"

The dinner came to an end, the ladies left the table, and after a chat with Pannell, during which the latter talked a good deal about a great pigeon-shooting match at Monaco that day, Range strolled into the garden, and finding himself at last seated alone with his companion's sister, he said lightly—

"By the way, our pleasant little intimacy has had its run. I say 'good-bye' to you to-morrow morning."

"Good-bye! To-morrow!" gasped the lady, turning her great eyes upon him; and, though it was too dark to see, Range felt that

she had turned pale, while the spasmodic manner in which she clenched her hand showed that she was deeply moved.

"Yes," he said, trying to speak quietly, "I have stayed here already far longer than I intended; but you and your brother have made my visit very pleasant. Perhaps we shall meet again somewhere later on."

"Oh!"

"Miss Pannell!" exclaimed Range, quickly, as his companion uttered a low moan and sank back in her chair.

"Don't—don't speak to me," she whispered, hoarsely. "Don't touch me. I shall be better soon. I—oh, heaven help me, it is too hard to bear!"

She seemed fainting, and, hastily rising, Range caught her by the arms, for she appeared as if about to glide from her chair to the earth.

As he touched her she thrust him from her with an angry movement, and then flung her arms about his neck, sobbing passionately.

"Mr. Range—Arthur! I cannot bear it. I shall die."

"My dear Miss Pannell!" he said, hastily.

"What have I done?" she sobbed, as she clung to him, and hid her face upon his breast. "You are saying it to try me. It is too cruel to make me betray myself like this."

"You are mistaking me," he said, half angrily.

"Then it was to try me!" she cried. "You will not leave me, then!"

"I had made up my mind to go to-morrow."

"And now you will stay?" she whispered, as her sobs grew less frequent.

"Now I shall not hesitate for a moment," he said, coldly. "Miss Pannell, you have mistaken me."

"No, no, no!" she wailed. "You are saying this for some reason. You could not treat me like this."

"Miss Pannell, for heaven's sake, think. You forget yourself."

She snatched her hands from his neck and stood up before him in the darkness with flashing eyes.

"Oh!" she sobbed, hoarsely; "this is horrible!"

"Hush!" he said, more gently. "We have been mistaken."

"And have I forgotten myself like this to be insulted?" she panted.

"I do not insult you," he replied, in a low, deep voice. "You are excited and angry with me now, though my behaviour has been throughout innocent of any thought beyond being your friend."

"Oh, this is cruelty indeed!" she panted. "You madden me by your treatment."

"I wish to treat you as a gentleman should treat a lady," he replied.

"And you have led me on for weeks past to think that you cared for me," she said, in an excited whisper, "only to play with me and cast me off."

"I'm very sorry," he replied, quietly. "I have led such a retired life in the West that I do not understand etiquette. I wanted to be polite and agreeable, that is all. Miss Pannell, I'm very sorry. There now, let's shake hands. This has been a misunderstanding that you will forget in a few days."

"Of what is a man's heart made?" she muttered.

"I beg your pardon, indeed I do," he cried, earnestly. "Say you will forgive me. Come, let us be friends once more."

"Forgive you! You beg my pardon!" she said, in a fierce, angry voice. "Do you think words like these will atone for your grievous wrong? My brother shall punish you for it—he shall kill you."

"Kill me, eh? Come, Miss Pannell, isn't that rather hard upon a man who has never said more than a friendly word to you?"

"Oh, it is unbearable!" she panted.

"Don't talk like that," he said. From his ignorance of such matters he was trying to stem an overpowering tide—the anger of a passionate woman. "I'm very sorry," he continued, when he had better have been silent and left her to herself—"I'm very sorry for all this, I am indeed. You're angry with me over a misunderstanding; but I don't deserve your anger, and when you've cooled down you'll give me credit for being frank."

"You professed to love me!" she cried, with a stamp of the foot.

"Upon my word, no. But there, come, let's part friends."

"Part?"

"Yes, for we had better not meet again. And there, don't you be afraid about me. I'm a very ordinary sort of fellow, but I am honest, and of course I can't help feeling a little flattered about all this."

"Then you do love me?" she cried, eagerly.

"Not a bit," he said, sharply. "I never did love a woman yet, and I never shall."

"Ah!"

"There, now, you're flying out again, and we had better understand one another in a cool, quiet way. I wanted to tell you that I can't help feeling flattered that you should have thought so much of me. I'm saying all this very lamely, but you must forgive me, for I mean well. But don't you be alarmed. What has passed to-night is a secret between us."

"A secret!" she said, contemptuously; and there was withering scorn in her look.

"Yes, a secret. I came to Europe to try and pick up a little of these people's polish—to try and make myself a gentleman—so don't you think I should be such a blackguard as to go boasting about all this to men I meet."

"Ah!"

"Yes, you are hurt, and you feel bitter against me; but you will not in a few days' time. You will shake hands with me directly,

and after that you are going one way, I'm going another, and all those words that you have said will be like so much thin air."

"Ah!" again.

"Let's forget all this," he said, softly; and, as he spoke, he held out his hand to her with a frank, manly look of pity in his face, in strong contrast to the bitter, vindictive aspect that the night half hid from him.

As he held out his hand she raised hers, and a sob escaped her breast. For one moment her right hand sparkling with jewels was raised as if to take his. Then she became rigid as steel, and she struck his hand violently with hers clenched, and the marks of the rings were indented in his palm.

"Then you won't be friends?" he said, sadly.

"Friends?" she said, in a hoarse whisper. "Friends? You don't know me. You don't know what it is to slight a woman who offers you her love. Friends!"

"Yes, come, come, let us part friends."

"Friends with you! You have to learn yet what it is to insult me. I'll never forgive you. You shall hear of me when you least expect it, and, in spite of your boast, the day will come when you will be suing some proud woman for her love. Let her treat you then as you have treated me."

"How can you be so bitter?" he said, softly.

"How could I be anything else?" she cried, fiercely. "But I can wait, and some day you shall repent all this."

"No, no, you'll forgive me."

"Never. Forgive you? Not if I were dying. Once more I tell you that you shall bitterly repent all this."

She turned away, and he stood listening to the loud *ruff ruff* of her dress as she walked hastily towards the house.

CHAPTER V.

AN ANNOUNCEMENT AND THE ENDORSEMENT.

"How unfortunate!" thought Range. "Poor woman! I have never flirted with her, as they call it. I must not go and leave her like this. It would be cruel—too cruel. It must not go on; but I ought to try and make some atonement to her. I'll stay a few days longer.

"It's very unfortunate," he muttered. "I don't know though. There's nothing very unfortunate in being loved by a handsome woman.

"Temper, though," he said, after a pause. "Well, I don't know that I should find fault with that. What is a woman without a little spirit? Besides, poor thing, she was half mad with bitterness and despair. I'll stop and break with her more gently.

"Too late. I'm in a mess. Here's a messenger from her brother.

He wants me to fight, eh! Ah, well, I'm not going to be frightened into loving a woman."

For just then a dapper little French gentleman—Pannell's adversary in the Parisian restaurant—came up and raised his hat.

"Mr. Arturre Lincoln Wange?" he said. "Would he make me the honour?"

"That's my name. Yes, what is it?"

"I would speak to you words relate to people you have encounter here."

"I see," said Range, drily. "You come from the brother. In plain English, you want me to fight?"

"To fight, yes," said the Frenchman; "word of honour, yes. There is cause."

"Matter of opinion, sir. Well, what does the brother wish? But you ought to see my friend."

"Your friend, sir? No; for you have play cartes with that man, that swindlaire!"

"What man? What swindler?"

"That Pannell man, with his wife."

Range caught the Frenchman fiercely by the arm.

"What?" he cried.

"You hurt my arm much. You are angry, Monsieur. But I tell you that you are a trapped. Thees man is carte swindlaire—sharp's you call him. He lives his wits, as you American says. He plays wiz ze pokaire and sheat."

"Impossible!" cried Range, and the Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"Faith of a man, no, Monsieur. He has win you money. He go from place to place wiz his wives, and——"

"Here! stop a moment," cried Range, who was half stunned by the light that struck in upon his brain.

"At pleasure," said the Frenchman. "I am at Sir's service. Sir is a gentleman. I am a gentleman. I like ze play—to win—to lose. All gentlemen should make their best to disclose the carte sharp swindlaire, who goes about with a wife who is jolie to attraper—trap you call it—the young men."

"No, no, I can't believe it," cried Range, excitedly.

"Monsieur has been warn—put *en garde*. He will see."

"I beg your pardon," said Range, eagerly. "You mean well, sir, and I thank you. Perhaps you are right, and I have been terribly deceived; but it is hard to believe it at first."

They bowed stiffly and parted, the French gentleman going back towards the hotel, and Range making for the darkest part of the garden, where he strolled into one of the arbours and sat down to think.

He had hardly taken his place when he heard voices approaching.

"Pannell and his sister," he muttered, and he half rose; but he did not wish to meet them, and he sank back in his seat as they

began talking eagerly in a low tone; and from the sounds it was evident that they had taken their seats in the adjoining arbour.

Once more Range half rose; but he now became aware that there were at least three people present, one of whom said sharply:

"Did he know that you were Jack's wife?"

"No; hadn't a suspicion."

"Ah, there you were wrong, my lad. That's where you failed," said the same voice, in reply to what had evidently been Pannell's. "You're a fine-looking fellow, Jack, a good one at the cards, and you've the pluck of a lion, but in anything that wants a little brains to work it you're a baby."

Range sat grasping the seat with both his hands, forgetful of every idea of its being a contemptible thing to do to play eaves-dropper. All he realised was that these people were talking about him, and that there must be something wrong more than he knew, though here was proof evident that the Frenchman was right.

"Why, what ought I to have done?" said Pannell, gruffly.

"Let the fool think it was your wife. This sort of fellow doesn't care about marriage. You might have turned him round your thumb."

"Ah, you're very clever," growled Pannell.

"Can't help it," said the other voice. "'Tis my nature to."

"I did my best. I got about five hundred out of him."

There was a thump on the table here, and Range ground his teeth with rage.

"I'm ground sharp, I am," he muttered to himself. "It was time I travelled if I let the first black I meet trick me."

"That's you all over, Jack Pannell," said the voice Range did not know. "You begin at once to try and get hold of a few hundred dollars, and let the great substance slip through your fingers. Confound you! Big body: little brain."

"Don't you go too far," growled Pannell, ominously.

"No, no, Shell, no quarrelling," said another voice fresh to Range. "No words, please; no words. Jack Pannell was right; he has got something. If it hadn't been for this, all the money we've spent so far would have been thrown away."

"Pish!" cried the other. "Do have some breadth, Nathan. Well, Sarah, so you've made a *coup manqué* this time?"

"Yes," said the deep, low voice that Range had often fancied so pleasant and sweet; and he mused, as he sat there biting his lips and asking himself if he were in a dream, it all seemed so impossible after the scene of a short time back.

"Shouldn't have thought it."

"Yes, I've failed," she said, hoarsely; "and I tell you, I'm sick of all this wretched degradation—this lying and cheating. If I were an actress at a theatre I could live another life as well."

"Thank goodness!" thought Range, "she is not all bad." The next moment he drew in his breath with an angry hiss as she went on—

"Here I'm to be always pretending and being dangled about as a bait, and for such an idiot as this."

"He is a bit of an idiot, then, is he?"

Range felt the blood tingling in his cheeks and brow.

"Yes, a cold-hearted, miserable, despicable wretch. I tell you I'm sick of it."

"You live we'll, Sarah, and I noted, as I looked round to-day, that you were the best-dressed woman at the *Bad*."

"I tell you I'm sick of it," she cried, in a low, angry voice. "I'm sick of the degradation. Jack shall break with you two. I'll have no more of it."

"Seems to have put you out a good deal, Sarah."

"Put me out? Look here, Frank Sheldrake, I know what you think of me; but I tell you this, you need not bully my husband——"

"Her husband!" thought Range. "Well, that's proof enough," and he drew in his breath with another hiss.

"For I tell you this, if that Range had been anything like the man I thought him you should not have fleeced him."

"Eh! What do you mean?"

"I'd have put him on his guard."

"Delicious enigma, woman. Why, Jack Pannell, don't you feel jealous? The millionaire has made an impression."

One moment Arthur Range felt ready to leap up and dash into the next arbour; the next moment some word spoken chained him to his seat, and he stayed.

"No," said Pannell, sulkily. "Sarah and I understand each other a bit."

"Ah, well, you're not going to warn him now, are you?"

"Pshaw! No. Do your worst. I'll help you all I can."

"That's better," said the same bland voice. "Richard—I mean Sarah—is herself again! Now, look here: wasn't I right?"

"I must listen," said Range, for the thought that he was the object of this plot drove out all others.

"Right, why?" said the thin, eager voice, that was also strange to the listener.

"Why, about bringing part of the brigade to bear instead of the whole."

"Right? no," growled Pannell. "Shell, you're the most conceited fool I ever met. Here, if you had come on at once when we had him in tow, we might have got a good round sum out of him in place of a few hundreds. The chance is gone now, and the game is up."

"Yes," said the thin sharp voice. "I knew it. I felt that we were wasting good capital. You're right, Pannell. He wouldn't take my advice. He is so headstrong over his own plans. The game is up."

"Is it?" said the bland voice, coolly.

"Yes," said the woman's voice, softly. "He starts for England to-morrow."

"Does he?" muttered Range; and then he listened more intently, for Sheldrake uttered a quiet—

"Ah!"

"And the sooner we get back the better."

"Think so, Nathan? Ah, well, we'll see. I'm a fool, am I, and headstrong, eh?"

"Yes, horribly headstrong. No end of money has been spent."

"Don't talk so loud, Nathan Mewburn. No one is likely to hear us, or to understand us if he did, but we may as well keep our tongues in hand. Hah! yes, this has been a failure, but it was only a skirmish. I've made the plans of my campaign, and this was only feeling the enemy."

Range longed to creep nearer, but he dared not move, and he sat there in the darkness as the scent of a good cigar floated to where he listened.

"Now he's going to play the general," said Pannell, with a sneer.

"Yes, big, handsome, broad Jack Pannell, play the general. My dear boy, I'm enjoying a good cigar. I have dined well, and I am now in a tranquil and amiable frame of mind, and ready to bear your blunderings philosophically. My dear boy, the proper study of mankind is man. You will find it in the writings of the most irreligious of Popes."

"Don't fool about, Frank," growled Pannell.

"Yes, don't fool about, Shell," said the other. "What shall we do next? Why not start back to-morrow, and be content with what Jack Pannell has got? Every hour we stay here is so much heavy loss."

"Ah, let's get back. There's a French scoundrel I won a few pounds from at Paris come in to-night, and he'll be talking about me because I wouldn't stop and fight."

"Proofs accumulate," thought Range. "I'll hear what they mean to do."

"A fellow," continued Sheldrake, in a low voice, and in a deliberately tantalising manner, "sees some one fail in hooking a fish after the first cast, and calls his brother man fool. 'Pack up your tackle,' he saith, 'and let's go home. We shall never catch that fish.'"

"And we never shall now. He has seen the tackle and bait, and will be on his guard."

"Perhaps so," said Sheldrake, calmly; "but, speaking as a fool, I say wait awhile. He would not take our pretty butterfly, and while it was being played before his eyes I said, 'Let Nathan Mewburn and me keep out of sight behind the bushes.' Now you see the fool's plan was right. The fish has seen the tackle, the big fisherman, and the bait, but the men behind the bushes he has not seen, and they have their turn to try."

"Yes, but how?" said Mewburn, in a low whisper, full of eagerness.

"You're always bragging about plans," said Pannell. "What are you going to do? Are you really going to try again?"

"Am I really going to try again?" said Sheldrake, quietly. "Ha, ha!"

"Curse you, why don't you speak?" growled Pannell.

"Don't waste words, Jack. One of your curses would never harm any one."

"We're wasting time," said Mewburn, querulously, "and time here means money. Speak out, Shell; do pray speak out, if you really have any plan worth working."

"Plan worth working!" exclaimed Sheldrake, throwing himself back in the rough garden-seat; and a spark of light came through the light trellis over Range's head as the man cast the end of his cigar away. "Plans! You called me a fool amongst you," he continued, in a low, fierce voice, that startled the listener, it was so changed; "but you don't think me a fool. Do you suppose I've come all this way for nothing, and with never a bright star to lure one on? No, my lads; I'm going to lay traps; I'm going to spread nets; I'm going to be the unseen spider for that little golden fly. The threads shall cling round him till he's helpless, and he shall say, 'There you are, suck my blood; suck all you want, but leave me just enough to live.'"

"Hah!" came in a low hiss from Mewburn, and a soft sound, as of some one gently rubbing his hands.

"I'm going to spread that spider's web for that fly if it's broken and torn five thousand times, and if it takes me twenty years."

"Humph!" grunted Pannell.

"Hah!" hissed Mewburn, as the soft rubbing of his harsh-skinned hands continued, and with it a crackling noise as of one ring touching another. "And if," he whispered, as he seemed to have caught the eager infection, "you can't do it by fair means, you will try——"

"Foul!" grunted Pannell, for his companion had stopped.

"No," said Sheldrake, after a pause. "I'm not that kind of fool. That's the work of the clumsy, ignorant brute who sheds blood, gets hanged for his pains, and serve him right. He is put out of the world. Now, Master Nathan Mewburn, I pride myself on being a gentleman. Any clumsy brute can knock a man down with a life-preserver, striking so hard that his victim never comes to. Any self-satisfied idiot can poison and be found out. I tell you I am not that kind of fool."

"Look here, Shell, I was huffed just now. I beg your pardon."

"Granted, my good big Jack. I'm not put out. I want you, and I want Nathan here, and I shall make this *coup* a big one for us all. You were huffed at your bit of a failure. After all, perhaps fate meant it as a start. Your five hundred will go into the bank to the rest, and it won't be bad to catch our fly with his own honey."

"Then you mean to follow him to England?" said the deep rich voice that had spoken that night of love.

"If he goes there next I shall, my dear madam. And, by the way did you speak in tones like that to Crœsus?"

"Why?" she retorted, harshly.

"Because, if you did, I wonder you should have failed."

"Keep your compliments to yourself, unless you want Jack here to be told to knock you down. He can."

"Yes, or an ox," said Sheldrake, coolly.

"I say, then you are going to follow him to England?"

"And I say yes."

"And you are in earnest? You mean to carry out your schemes?"

"Do I mean to carry out my schemes? Ha, ha, ha!"

Range felt a curious shudder run through him as he heard the man's low, mocking laugh.

"Then lose no time," said the woman, in a low, passionately vindictive voice.

"Right, right!" said Mewburn, rubbing his hands. "She's right; it will save capital."

"He will go to-morrow, I feel sure," continued the woman. "Follow him at once. I'll help you; Jack shall help you in any way, and——"

"Gently, gently," said Sheldrake, quietly. "I am going to advise you to keep out of sight—for the present," he added, meaningly. "Your time will come; and you mean," he said, softly, "you mean——?"

"To follow him till I bring him down before me on his knees," she said, in a voice that was half-choked with rage. "He shall beg—and——"

"Hush!" whispered Sheldrake, "there is some one in that next place."

In his excitement Arthur Range had drawn a loud hissing breath, and he started at those words to his feet, for he heard at the same moment a peculiar *click! click!*

CHAPTER VI.

FRIENDS AND FOES.

"No, no; don't fire!"

Some heroes of adventure would doubtless have dashed through the frail trellis-work and alighted in the midst of the plotters, declaring himself the object of their pursuit, and scattering the evil-doers by a display of bravery backed up by rectitude.

Arthur Lincoln Range was not a hero of adventure. Moreover, he had more than once seen mining affrays in his own land whose results were hasty funerals amongst the needle-shedding pines.

More than once he had noticed what a very small hole made by a little conical bullet was sufficient to let out the whole of a man's life.

Under these circumstances, and with a full belief that the better part of valour was discretion, he darted out of the arbour, passed amongst the clumps of evergreens, and was lost in the gloom before the occupants of the next place could get round.

"What a coward I am!" he said to himself, as soon as he neared the illuminated part of the garden. "I ought to have faced the gang of swindlers—and perhaps have been shot."

Range passed on up to the terrace, took a chair at one of the tables, and lit a cigar, at the same time bidding a waiter bring him some coffee.

"It was cowardly, perhaps, to run like that," he thought; "but what a gang! Well, forewarned is forearmed. What did that fellow say? He had made his plans—play spider—and me the fly—suck my blood—money of course."

He took a sip of the coffee that had been brought, and as he did so noticed through his half-closed eyes that a handsome, elderly man of military carriage led his companion, a young and very attractive lady, to a seat close by.

"I shall think all handsome women pitfalls and snares for the future," Range said to himself. "Who could have thought it? She seemed so real that I began to think I was cold and stony, and that, even if I did not care for the woman, my time had come, and that it was a duty I owed to her to marry her, and learn to love her afterwards. The Jezebel!"

The military-looking gentleman, whose hair and moustache were of silvery white, though his face bore few of the marks of age, seemed to be treating his companion with a marked chivalry of manner; and, as Range sat communing with himself, he noted the various little attentions paid to the lady, and the tender, almost paternal, high-bred courtesy displayed in every act.

"What had I better do—pack up and go back at once?—like a cur with his tail between his legs, because I am frightened! What an idiot!—hah! that's what they said I was. Suppose that I show them I am not. It would be too absurd: run off because a pack of sharpers want to swindle me! No, I'm not going to run away. That's what they will do, for I'll be bound to say I never set eyes on that pair again. I wonder what the other two were like?"

Almost as he said this a couple of spectacled Germans seated themselves on the farther side of the elderly officer and the lady, ordered bocks of Strasbourg beer, and began to fill large meerschaum pipes, and then sat smoking in silence.

"Do you feel at all cold, my dear?" said the elderly officer, and he made a movement towards the light scarf that was hanging on the back of his chair.

"Not in the least," was the reply. "Why, Harry dear, you want to spoil me."

The current of Arthur Range's thoughts was turned, and he involuntarily raised his eyebrows as he mentally repeated the lady's words—"Why, Harry dear, you want to spoil me"—and looked at them curiously.

"Not father and daughter. A case of honeymoon. May and December—well, no, say sunny October. Fine, gentlemanly fellow. Lady—well, if I had not had a sickener of the species I should say

a very handsome month of May; but—yes: she is a very beautiful Englishwoman.”

In fact, there was so much to attract in the lady's sweet, almost girlish features, that, whenever he had an opportunity of doing so without being rude, Range glanced at her oval face, abundant dark-brown hair, and large, heavily-shaded eyes.

At every look he seemed to find fresh attractions: now it was her well-cut, very slightly aquiline nose; the next time it was her pleasantly curved mouth; and directly after the glimpse obtained of white teeth as the lady's face lit up with a very engaging smile.

“Yes; she's very handsome,” thought Range. “So was *Miss Sarah Pannell*. But, hang it! I'm insulting a beautiful English lady by making comparisons. All women can't be bad, and this one looks to be innocence itself. She is, I'd swear!”

Rather a bold declaration for inexperience to make, but he made it, and sat back noting the actions of his neighbours without appearing to be heeding them; while, on the other side, the two German gentlemen smoked quietly on, and sipped their beer, gazing apparently on vacancy, for their large, staring spectacles gave them an extremely stolid look.

“How pretty these places are!” said the lady, suddenly; “the lights glancing among the trees, the distant strains of the music, and the soft, summery feeling there is out here. It is very beautiful.”

“So beautiful that you will regret going back to poor old Yorkshire and humdrum life again?” said the old officer, with a tinge of sadness in his voice.

“Harry!”

It was only one word, and it was accompanied by a glance round to see that the action was not observed, as a little, carefully-gloved hand was laid upon the old officer's arm.

“But it will seem dull for you,” he said, tenderly.

“Dull! And with all my new life to attend to! How can you think such things?”

“You have seemed to enjoy our tour so much.”

“Of course I have,” said the lady, gaily. “It came all so fresh, and new and bright—and,” she whispered, “I have been so happy!”

Range did not catch these words, but he saw a look pass between the pair, and felt somehow half annoyed.

“I wish they'd go,” he muttered. “Ah, well! they came here. I did not go and sit down by them.”

“I've enjoyed it immensely, dear,” said the lady, nodding her shapely head; “but I don't want to stay any longer. One doesn't want to live on bon-bons.”

“Then we may go back home soon?”

“As soon as you like, dear. Let's leave these places with a pleasant remembrance; and, ah! when you come to look, what is, after all, to compare with dear old Elnthorpe and our Yorkshire hills?”

"You are saying that to please me."

"I'm glad it does please you; but I did not."

"This is getting sickly," muttered Range. "I must go."

"Besides," continued the lady, "look at the company we shall have. George Carleigh home from the wars. How ridiculous it will be! I wonder what he will say."

"What, George? Delighted to get home again, of course. Hah! he must have some good shooting this year. I wonder how Burton has got on, and what visitors he has had from Sheffield and Rotherham."

"What, poachers, dear? Oh, I hope there will be no trouble with them."

"None at all, my dear, if the Sheffield lads leave me alone and don't be taking a fancy to my birds."

"Never mind them. Then there's Judy."

Range was getting up to go, yawning slightly, but that last word made him drop back into his chair.

"I wonder what dear Judith is like now. I hope that horrid Eastern sun has not spoiled her lovely complexion."

Range took out his cigar-case, and his fingers trembled as he selected a fresh roll of leaf, staring very hard now at the two Germans, who looked straight before them and did not speak.

"I don't suppose she will be altered a bit, nor Robert either. We shall just be in time to get settled before they come."

"Judith—Robert!" said Range to himself. "Miss Judith Nesbitt—Sir Robert Fanshaw. Oh, it is impossible!" and he jumped up hastily and went into the hotel.

As he did so, the two spectacled Germans deliberately emptied their boots, and rose and followed him.

Range went straight to the Herr Landlord's office and asked to look at the visitor's book.

It was handed to him with a bow, and on opening it there was the arrival on the previous night, from Baden-Baden, of General Sir Harry and Lady Fanshaw.

"It must be a brother," thought Range; and he walked quickly back, passing between the two German gentlemen, who slowly turned, followed him, and began to promenade deliberately near the table as Range went straight to where the elderly gentleman and the lady were sitting.

"I beg your pardon," he said, hastily, "but Sir Harry Fanshaw, I believe."

The old officer bowed rather stiffly.

"I hope you'll excuse me. I could not help hearing you speak sometimes. I heard names—I—I——"

Range was very hot and confused. He needed a little European polish.

"Pray continue," said Sir Harry, blandly.

"My name is Range—Arthur Lincoln Range."

The general bowed.

"One of the richest men in the States, and never even heard of," thought Range, like a flash.

"From America—Colorado."

Sir Harry bowed again, coldly. The lady looked icy; she had read of intrusive Americans. Here was evidently one.

"I'm taking a run through Europe," said Range, hurriedly, and feeling terribly in want of the calm ease he saw amongst gentlemen.

Sir Harry bowed again, and a slight frown began to appear on his clear forehead; while the two Germans had stopped, and one of them was very deliberately lighting a match to hold to his companion's pipe as he uttered the one word "*Zo!*"

"I took a run round the world last year."

"I beg your pardon. You'll excuse me. Lady Fanshaw will feel the night air."

Sir Harry rose stiffly.

"Exactly! Yes!" said Range, desperately. "I beg your pardon—rather rude of me; I was only going to say I stopped a month at Malaypore.—How distant these English are!" he added to himself.

"At Malaypore?" cried Sir Harry, stopping short.

"Yes; part of the time with Sir Robert Fanshaw."

"My brother?"

"Yes; and I met Miss Judith—Miss Nesbitt."

Sir Harry's manner was entirely changed. This was the best of introductions.

"My dear sir," he cried, warmly, as he shook hands, "I am very glad to meet you. Let me introduce you: my wife. Alice, my dear, of course this is the gentleman of whom Robert spoke. Mr. Range, I beg your pardon! I don't care to make many acquaintances when travelling—an insular habit—but I am glad to know you."

Lady Fanshaw did not feel the cold air for some time longer; neither did the two German gentlemen, who had seated themselves at another table to drink two more bocks of beer and make clouds. In fact, a lively conversation about Malaypore was carried on for quite an hour, during which time Sir Harry had come to the conclusion that their new acquaintance was rather American—naturally—but a nice, frank, manly fellow. Alice—Lady Fanshaw—had found him extremely natural and shrewd, and when they parted for the night the lady observed to her husband—

"I'll be bound to say, dear, that there's something between Judy and him."

"No, no, no! Nonsense, my dear! We mean Judith for Carleigh. That's as good as settled."

"Ah, well!" said Lady Fanshaw, merrily, "we shall see."

As for Range, he had made two very agreeable acquaintances—had accepted a most warm invitation to go down to Elmhthorpe, Yorkshire, to stay. What was more, he was going to remain two

more days at Salzbingen, and then travel with Sir Harry and his lady.

Lastly, he had forgotten all about his bit of a scare over the harbour matter, or if he recalled it for a moment it was only to smile at his escape from an ugly entanglement at so moderate a price—as he considered it. He had given his enemies funds to carry on the war, but he felt convinced that he should hear no more of them now. They had only been vapouring, and if he did encounter them—there were the police.

All the same, as soon as Sir Harry, his lady, and Arthur Range had finished their conversation, the cloud-making ceased, the books were emptied, and the two German gentlemen walked slowly away to another hotel, where they sat talking for some hours with John Pannell and his wife.

It is worthy of remark that they were now without spectacles, and the German aspect had passed away.

CHAPTER VII.

BREAD CAST UPON THE WATERS.

ARTHUR RANGE made the most of his time in London before going down to Elmthorpe.

"Better come down with us, Mr. Range," Sir Harry said, warmly, and Lady Fanshaw added her persuasions. "You are a stranger, and I don't want to hear that you have got into any trouble."

"Trouble, Sir Harry?"

"Well, had any of our clever swindlers on your track?"

"Oh, I can take care of myself," said Range, confidently.

"That's what we all say, my dear sir, and then we read every day that some self-confident person has been cheated by the most trivial and stale of tricks. Ah, well, I can remember my own feelings when I saw London for the first time. Go and drink your fill of sights and sounds, and then come and see our quiet country-home. My brother will be with us by then."

They parted, with Range undertaking to be at Elmthorpe in a fortnight, and he went to his hotel.

"I felt horribly guilty after I had declared I could take care of myself," he said, with a half-laugh. "I wonder what has become of my American friend and his fair sister."

Range did as most strangers do who visit London for the first time: he saw the principal buildings and sights, and concluded that the greatest sight of all was the street, with its hurrying crowds intent on pleasure, toil, or nothing at all. There was always something to interest him, and to enjoy this to the full his favourite station was the knife-board of some omnibus, from whence he could survey the metropolis from Chelsea to Wapping, from Islington to

Camberwell, and then try others that took him north-west, south-east, and to the various points of the compass.

More than one vulture had marked him out for prey, but without effect, and he spent his days in the streets, seeing all he could.

Covent Garden was handy to his hotel, and after seeing it by day a visitor at the hotel whom he encountered in the central avenue asked him if he had seen it in the very early morning, when the carts and vans were bringing in the day's supplies.

The hint was enough. The next morning he was there in the busy crowd, thoroughly enjoying the bustle and excitement of the distribution of vegetables, fruit, and flowers, till, turning to go, with an inward monitor that was not conscience bidding him remember the truth of the French proverb, *Il faut manger*, he saw something that attracted his notice at once.

It was only a man stepping out of a public-house—a sight he had seen thousands of times. It was the man who took his attention as he hastily brushed his lips with the worn, black kid glove he carried in his white hand.

Their eyes met, and Range was conscious of a stare that became an angry frown as the man turned sharply round and walked away in the direction of Drury Lane Theatre.

"Parson!" said Range to himself, as he looked after the departing figure in shabby black, and wearing a dilapidated Inverness cape. His tall hat was battered and unbrushed as was his hair. His boots were gaping at the sides; round his neck there was the sign of his order, a white tie; but its aspect seemed to say that that order had been dragged down and trailed in the dust.

His face endorsed this suggestion, and it was the face that had taken Range's attention.

It was that of a young man of seven or eight and twenty, pale, with sunken cheeks and curious, careworn lines about the corners of the dark-circled eyes. Not a bad face at all. There was none of the reddened nose and swollen, sensual lip of the hard drinker, only the bloodshot eyes, with their heavy, vacant look to tell of their owner's habit; and it was this face that had made Range glance at the soiled habiliments, and he became interested at once.

"Parson!" he said to himself again; "and gone to the dogs," he added, as he slowly followed the man at a distance.

Arthur Range wanted his breakfast badly. He had been in the market since the night-porter let him out at half-past four. He did not want adventures, nor to practise philanthropy or anthropological analysis; but somehow, as if some strange fate were bidding him follow that man, he set aside thoughts of coffee, fresh French bread, and fried soles—a delicacy which, not being found in his own country, he hailed with intense appreciation—and slowly turned down Wellington Street after the dingy Inverness cape which concealed a multitude of shabbiness, and followed it on to Waterloo Bridge.

"Now, I'm not clever at this sort of thing," said Range to himself; "but that chap's a gentleman—university man, perhaps—spent all his money, got into debt, done something to disgrace himself, and now he's drinking himself to death, sliding out of the world, and if he goes on like this it won't take long."

Range saw the man he followed go into a recess about half way across the bridge and sit down.

"Well, I may as well go and have my breakfast," he said. "Why should I notice him more than the thousands of other poor wretches who are going the same road?"

Then, as he said this, and determined to go back, the strange influence that had brought him so far made him turn into the recess and sit down at right angles to the object of his interest.

The poor wretch had sunk down, with his back against the granite parapet, and with his chin upon his chest. But as Range seated himself he started up to stare angrily, the frown deepening upon his brow as he exclaimed in a hoarse, cracked voice:

"Why are you following me? Are you in the police?"

"No," said Range. "I only saw you come here, and I followed: that's all."

"What do you want?"

"Want? Nothing."

"Why have you tracked me, then? I saw you as I came out of that—— No," he burst out, with a hoarse laugh, "I won't say that. It has been more of a heaven to me. What do you want?"

"I want? Nothing. Have a cigar?"

Range took out his case, for he felt confused and puzzled. He had walked after this man with no definite purpose. He had followed him, he told himself, because he had followed him, and the offer of a cigar seemed the only way out of a difficulty.

"Cigar?" said the other, drawing back. "Well, why not? Thanks, I will."

He took the cigar, bit off the end, and lit it from the offered match. Range also lit one, and they sat and smoked in silence.

"Poor fellow!" thought Range. "He speaks like a gentleman. Whatever he has done he is taking his punishment. I say," he said aloud, as the bloodshot eyes gazed into his, "do you always take what we call an eye-opener?"

"Morning drink? Yes, when I can get it. So would you if——"

"If what?"

"You wanted it to serve as supper, bed, and breakfast. However, it was the last."

"Last! What do you mean?" cried Range, as he read the apparent reality of the man's state in his eyes.

"Mean? Oh, nothing!"

Here was another silence, during which Range thought to himself:—"If this fellow's an impostor he has some excuse for it."

"Are you—a clergyman?" said Range, at length.

"I was—suppose I am still," said the other bitterly. "Why? Do you want a private chaplain? If so, and you will give me a bit of bread, and a bone to gnaw like a dog, with some straw to sleep on, I'll come and pray for you. Ah!" he cried, with a fierce energy that was startling, "as man never prayed before."

"I say," said Range, coldly, "why do you drink?"

"Drink? To drown it all: to keep the thought of it all away, the starvation, the misery, the wandering homeless about these cruel streets. Here, listen; you're a Yankee: I'll tell you. I couldn't speak to one of my own people like this; but you are a stranger, I know by your speech. I ate nothing yesterday. Last night I walked the streets, save when I sat down now and then upon a doorstep, only to get up and tramp again when I heard the police. This morning I still had the twopence I had hoarded; it was the last of the shilling I got for my old waistcoat, and I had some drink—you saw me come out. Well, it comforted me, as it has done before for hours, and then I came here."

He looked wildly at Range, who smoked on in silence.

"Why are you like this?" he said at last.

"What you call luck, I suppose," said the other, fiercely. "But there, it's all over now."

"Come, we're men much of an age. Why was it? Some scrape?"

"Scrape? No. Poverty. I've no friends; no patronage. I came up and tried teaching—tutor and that sort of thing—till I got so low that I could not pay my way."

Range looked at him curiously.

"You don't believe me. Well, why should you? Try it till you are insulted, because professing to be a gentleman you are sneered at by the servants of the house where you go to teach, and are requested not to come again by the people who employ you, because your garments are a disgrace."

Range still watched him.

"It was the drink did it," he said to himself.

"You don't believe, I see," returned his companion. "It is hard to believe. You think I disgraced myself in some way—that I drank. Well, think so. I look it. But you don't know how easy it is for a gentleman, once he is below the social level in appearance, to slide down—and down."

Range nodded.

"I don't know why I talk to you, but I do," said the man, hoarsely. "Perhaps, all the time I am speaking, you think I am some common swindler. Look at me—my rags—my dirt. Give me a shilling to get my hair cut and to have a good shampoo and wash, to make myself look more like a Christian, and I shall spend it in drink, every penny; but I shall live three days longer."

"Oh, but, hang it, man! where is your self-dependence? Surely,

if pride did not stop it, a man might make some living in this busy town?"

"Pride?" said Range's companion, with a mocking laugh. "Why, I sold newspapers; but the boys were quicker and I failed. I tramped down to Houndsditch and bought matches to sell again, but the boys were my rivals. Tell me what I can do, and I will try it. I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed."

"But friends—have you no friends?"

"Not one I could apply to—lost as I am."

"But recommendations?"

"Recommendations?" said the other, bitterly. "What are recommendations to a man who is dressed as I am? Look at me."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Sit here till night, and then, when the stars come out, and the lights are shining once more, I'm going—there."

He rose, knelt on the seat, leaned over the parapet, and pointed down at the water.

"It will look dark and calm and restful then, and the tide will be going out towards the sea, and the sea seems like eternity, and eternity seems rest."

Range had turned, and also knelt upon the seat, looking sideways at his companion, who met his eyes once more and answered their unspoken question.

"Why do I speak like this? It is what I drank. I tell you, I have not eaten since the night before last. You don't believe it, I see, but it is true; and I suppose I have been raving and talking as I never meant to talk. There—some day I shall sleep more and dream."

He settled himself down in the corner of the recess, and Range smoked on, watching him.

"Look here," he said at last, "suppose I help you."

"Help me?" said the other, bitterly. "Too late! too late!"

"No," said Range, stoutly; "it is not too late. I'm going to be very plain with you, but I'm going to help you all the same."

The man stared at him half angrily.

"What you say's too hard to believe," said Range. "It doesn't seem possible. I don't think it's true. In this great wealthy city there must be means of helping a young man like you out of the hole you're in."

"I tell you, it is too late," said his companion, hoarsely. "I did not ask you to follow me. Did I ask your help?"

"No; and, if your story's true, your pride has kept you from asking help before you had got so low."

"Don't insult me in my misery, man. Let me go my own way."

"I can't help saying plain things," said Range. "You needn't call them insulting."

He kept on smoking very leisurely, speaking between puffs of his cigar. His companion's had long been out.

"You see, I dare say, I'm a stranger in London; and you're there; I'm here. You form your opinion of me, I form mine of you, and here it is. You're a parson down in the mire for some reason that you don't tell me. I know you've had the education of a gentleman, and you have his manners; and, seeing you as you are, you seem like a clever impostor; and as to the rhapsodical bit about the jumping into the river to-night and ending it all, I couldn't believe that."

"Till you saw the inquest in the morning paper," said the other, with a curious smile. "I'm not surprised. Say what you think."

"Well, I'll tell you what I think, and that is," said Range, with a smile, "that you're keeping something back; but all the same I can't go away from you here, knowing that perhaps a little act of mine might have stopped a young fellow—a gentleman—from going quite to the dogs."

The man had let his chin fall upon his breast once more, his thin white, dirty hands slowly picking the remains of his cigar to pieces, while his lips moved convulsively.

"Look here," said Range, who missed nothing, "I believe there's some truth in your story. I see you are in a state of abject misery. There's my card. I'm at the Grand Hotel for a few days. After this here's my address—Sir Harry Fanshaw, Elmhorne, Brackley, Yorkshire. If I've gone from there they'll forward a letter. Now, there's twenty pounds—three fives, four pounds ten, and ten shillings in silver. Go and get some breakfast; don't touch that cursed drink; get yourself dressed like a Christian, and there,—there, try again."

As he spoke he quietly slipped the card and the money into the thin white hands, which closed upon them as the fingers of a drowning man cling talon-like to the rope that is thrown to him in his last struggle with death.

Then the squalid-looking creature turned slowly away, struggling painfully into a kneeling position with his arms upon the parapet, and his face bent down over them as if gazing once more into the river.

He did not speak. He uttered no word of thanks. There was merely a slight shiver or two about the thin shoulders, such as might have meant emotion or a suppressed, mocking laugh; and when, after walking a few dozen yards farther over the bridge, and then back, Range looked in the recess, the man had not changed his position.

"Well," said Range to himself, "we've some smart chaps in New York, and Master John Pannell and his lady got over me pretty well; but if this fellow is an actor, as I begin to think he is, he beats them hollow."

He walked on a bit and entered the Strand.

"Shall I watch him and see what he does? No; I want my breakfast. I've spent twenty pounds—I'm afraid I've been cleverly

swindled out of the money—but there was the chance that his story might be true, and what are twenty pounds to me? I'd sooner have given a hundred than leave, and learn to-morrow morning that the dead body of a young man, dressed as a clergyman, had been taken out of the river."

"Now I wonder what made me follow him?" he said.

After a pause.

"I wonder whether he was what he professed!"

Another pause.

"I wonder whether I shall ever hear from him again. If he does write to me, I can easily find out whether he is an impostor."

Another pause.

"I wonder what Uncle Wash would have said and done if he had been here?"

Another pause.

"Money is of some use then, after all, thank goodness! Here's the hotel. I'm starving. Well, I'll have another meal here, and then I'll go down to Sir Harry's and——"

He did not finish his sentence, for the memory of a very fair face with dark lashes and eyebrows, and soft pale golden hair, filled his mental vision till he reached the coffee-room, where, glancing round to see that he was not observed, he made a terrific onslaught upon the breakfast.

"Ah, well!" he said, as he began to feel better. "Poor wretch! he'll get some comfort out of what I gave him. I'm afraid I've been fooled, but I shall never know."

For there was no voice to whisper to his heart that, by one of the strangely devious paths of fate, he had that morning travelled down a way which his kindly act had paved, making the road easy for help to come in a time of need.

"Why, this is a very little world after all," said Range to himself, as he rose from his seat and yawned.

"If I'm not very much mistaken, there are the two German chaps who were at Salzbingen the night I met the Fanshaws. Yes, those must be my stolid-looking friends."

He glanced towards a table where a couple of long-haired, spectacled, heavy-looking men were partaking of their breakfast, very heartily apparently, but in utter silence. They were too much occupied with their meal even to look round, but as Range slowly strode by them, sauntering to where one of the morning papers lay upon a table, he heard the German travellers speak in deep guttural tones, apparently alluding to something that had gone before.

For the bigger and stouter of the two said in an inquiring tone of voice:

"*Ja?*"

And the other, in the deepest and most guttural of tones, replied:—

"*Zo!*"

"Pleasant companions they would be on a voyage," said Range to himself; and then to a waiter who came up, "Eh, for me?"

He took the buff envelope the man handed to him, and opened it as he returned to his seat to read—

"From Fanshaw,

"Elmthorpe, Brackley.

"To Arthur Lincoln Range, Esq.,

"Grand Hotel, London—

"Don't forget your promise. My brother and his niece are here. Country looking lovely."

"Ah!"

The latter was a sigh uttered by the reader, whose face flushed slightly, and, crumpling up the pink message, he let it fall, and sat thinking for some few minutes.

"I shall go," he said to himself. "No need to hesitate. Bah! I can't read papers now. I must go out and have a walk to still my nerves. Hang it all! I feel as excited and queer as if I had taken too much wine last night, and I drank none. Steady, my lad—steady! I thought you were as cool-blooded as a fish. I won't go. It's absurd. I should only be making myself miserable."

He sat thinking for a few moments.

"Yes, I will go; and, if it does make me miserable, why, it does. I should like to see her—them—again. The old General was a splendid fellow, and as for—— Oh! this won't do. I feel as if I wanted some quinine."

He got up and left the place, and as he quitted the room the taller and stouter of the German gentlemen rose slowly, napkin in hand, to stroll to Range's table and take the morning paper he had left.

As he reached the table, he dropped his napkin, and stooped slowly and picked it up.

No one observed the act; but when he returned to the table his companion did not say "Zo!" He whispered softly—

"Got it?"

And the stouter German's eyes glittered behind his large spectacles as he replied—

"All right!"

Then there was a faint rustling noise, and he took the crumpled-up telegram from the napkin and slipped it into his pocket.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAM BURTON IS INTERRUPTED.

"LOOKYE here, Milly, my lass, you've been back here a month now, and you know what we said before you started for the furren parts wi' her ladyship; you said——"

"Do keep that nasty dog away, Mr. Burton. Look at his teeth; and he smells dreadful."

"Down, Bess! Down, lass! Teeth? Why, she's smiling at your pretty face, Milly. She knows her master loves you, and she's strange and glad to see you again."

"Loves me, indeed!" said the pretty little rustic lady's-maid, who was standing in the grassy path of the Oak Wood, looking the prettier for the gleaming sunshine that fell in a silver shower through the leaves. "Loves me, indeed! You love your dogs more than anything else."

The broad-shouldered, black-bearded keeper, in whose closely-cut hair and crisp chin curls a few silver threads were peeping, smiled good-humouredly, looking a fine, manly specimen of an Englishman, in his brown velveteens and tanned leggings, as he leaned upon his gun.

"Love my dogs better than owt else?" he said. "No, my lass, that isn't so. I do love my dogs because they're the truest, faith-fullest beasts I knows on; and as to Bess there smelling, why, you might eat your dinner off her skin."

"Oh, how horrid!"

"Not it, my lass. Come now, don't be keeping me always at a distance, Milly—don't. Coom now, coom!"

"If you think I want to do what my lady did, marry an old man, you're much mistook, Mr. Burton, I can tell you. I don't want to be no old man's nurse."

"Owd man!" said the keeper, staring. "Why, thee don't call me an owd man, lass. I'm only just past forty, when a man's in his prime."

"I know you're twice as old as I am, Mr. Burton, and I'd thank you not to keep talking to me as you do."

"Nay, Milly, lass, thou does na mean that!" cried the keeper, who was growing excited, and who, when he grew excited, grew broad of speech.

"Indeed, but I do; and, if you can't talk different stuff to that, you may keep your distance."

"Thou'rt a bit put out wi' me, lass, about something, but I know thou dost na mean it, so I won't be popped about it, and I will talk about something else. What dost ta think of the 'Merican gent?"

"Oh, I don't know; he's very well."

"Seems makkin' up to Miss Judith, don't he?"

"What stuff you do talk, Mr. Burton. You're always thinking about making up to somebody."

"Well, that's natur' like, isn't it, lass? Everything as lives thinks about comin' together—birds and beasts and fishes, and all—so why shouldn't a man as loves the brightest, bonniest little lassie 'atween here and Hool?"

"Stuff and nonsense! Miss Judith's going to marry the captain."

"Then, if I were Miss Judith, I should tak' my young man to task for allus being hanging about after my lady. Mornin', noon, and night you see 'em together."

"Look you here, Sam Burton," cried the girl, turning scarlet, "if I was to tell my lady what you said, you'd be bundled off neck and crop by Sir Harry without a character."

"I don't care, it be true enough," said the gamekeeper, sturdily.

"It isn't true!" cried the girl, fiercely. "How dare you say such a thing of my lady, who's the nicest, kindest, and most beautiful woman as ever lived!"

"She's all that, lass, and it's a treat to hev her smile on you; but it be true all the same, and I don't think as Sir Harry knows, or he'd stop it."

"There!" cried the girl, sharply; "there! and you ask me to let you keep company with me!"

"Well, I hev sin' you were quite a strip of a girl, Milly. I allus loved thee, lass."

"And a nice life I should have with you!"

"I don't know what thou means, lass."

"Why, with your nasty, suspicious, jealous ways, a nice husband you'd make!"

"I'd make thee as true and honest a husband as a lass could have, Milly; and I'd about worship thee, my lass."

"And if Mr. Arthur Range spoke to me, or gave me a new ribbon, you'd be half mad with jealousy."

"Nay, lass, not I," said the keeper, smiling. "Mr. Arthur Range is a nice, free-spoken gentleman, and allus got a kind word for them as does anything for him."

"Ah, yes! gives you money, I suppose."

"Yes, often, my lass. He's very free wi' the brass; but if he were on'y a poor man I should like him just as well. The way he talks to and treats a dog does a man good to see."

"Dogs again!" said the girl, contemptuously; and then, with an arch, laughing look, "Then I was wrong about you being jealous, Mr. Burton, and you wouldn't mind if the captain were to kiss me again?"

The keeper's countenance changed; his brow knit, and he looked five years older on the instant.

"I told thee before, my lass, that, though he's Sir Harry's favourite, there's no good in the captain, and he means no good to thee. If he lays hands on thee again, gentleman or no gentleman, keep my place or lose it, I'll thrash him as I would the blackguardest porcher as come over from one of the big towns. I'd half kill him!"

"Burton! Sam! Oh don't!" faltered the girl, "don't talk like that; you frighten me."

"Frighten you, my bonny lass?" he said, as he let his gun fall against the trunk of the tree where they were standing, and with his face changing again till it wore a look of tender solicitude. "Don't you be scared wi' me. Why, Milly, lass, wouldn't thou hev a man ready to stand up for the lass he loves with all his heart? There, there, there!" he said, taking her gently and unresistingly in his

arms, and smoothing down her rather wilful hair, "don't 'ee cry. Because I could be hard and fierce with any one as was wrong to my lass, I couldn't say an ill word to thee."

"Don't, don't!" she sobbed. "There, let me go. I must go now."

"Thou must go now? Nay, not for a minute, my bonny bird. Just give me a wee bit of hope to tak' back wi' me—just to think over when I'm out wetching o' neets. Say thou'lt try to love me, my lass."

"No, no! Let me go, Sam."

"Yes, I'll let thee go, lass. Why, what is it?"

"There's—there's a man watching us!" she whispered.

"Nay, that's a trick of thine to mak' me let go. But I'll do it wi'out that, my lass. I'm a big, strong chap, and could do owt 'cept use my strength again a woman. I'm a wild one, but thou could do what thou likest with me. There, I've let thee go, and I wait till thou'lt lay thy pretty head thysen upon my breast, and lift that pretty mooth to mine."

"There is—some one watching us, Sam," she whispered; and she turned and fled as the beautiful long-haired Gordon-setter sprang up, uttered a sharp bark, and plunged into the wood.

The keeper seized the gun, and sprang after the dog just as a hoarse voice roared, with a savage oath—

"Call your dog off, or I'll put my knife in him!"

"Down, Bess! down, lass!" cried the keeper; and the dog crouched as the keeper stood face to face with a tall, unshorn, ragged specimen of humanity. He was not fifty, but his hair was white, and his nose and eyes were inflamed with constant application to the spirit glass.

"You put up that knife, or it'll be the worse for thee," cried the keeper. "What are you doing here?"

"Looking at you, can't you see?" growled the man.

"Are you going to put up that knife?"

"Are you going to call off your dog?"

"The dog's quiet."

"And the knife's shut," said the man, making the strong blade click, but keeping his eyes fixed upon the keeper, half mockingly, the while.

"How long has thee been there?"

"Why can't you say how long have you been there?" said the man, banteringly. "All the time you were courting that pretty lass there."

"You blackguard!"

"Don't call names, keeper; I didn't come to you. It was you brought the girl here."

The keeper gave his foot an angry stamp, examining the man searchingly the while, with his eyes running from head to foot.

"It's all right, keeper," said the fellow. "I haven't got any hares or pheasants in my pockets, and I haven't got a gun hid away, and I haven't stole anything."

"What are you doing here? Do you know you're trespassing?"

"I shall have to open that knife again," said the man, as the dog began sniffing suspiciously about him.

"Down, Bess! To heel, old girl!" cried the keeper; and the dog trotted back, to stand watching the man, and now and then uttering a low whine, as if not approving of the visitor.

"Do I know I'm trespassing, keeper? No! I only know I'm in the wood. Got any 'bacca, mate? My box is empty."

"Then I tell you that you are trespassing, if that won't do for thee. Now then, be off; thou'rt after no good."

"How do you know, keeper, eh?"

"Never you mind how I know it. You be off our grounds."

"Our grounds, eh?" said the fellow, laughing. "Ha, ha, ha! Do you and Sir Harry go halves?"

"Look here, my fine fellow," said Burton, sharply, "are you going?"

"No!"

"No?"

"Do you s'pose I've tramped all the way down here from London to see your master and I'm going back without seeing him?"

"You have come to see Sir Harry?"

"Yes, I have, and what have you got to say to that?"

"Why didn't you go up to the house?"

"Because the chaps in livery or the old butler would have sent me away."

"And you were hanging about here to see him?"

"I was having a nap, old 'un, when you came and disturbed me. P'raps I was going to wait and see him."

"What for?"

"Go it! Why, you're as clever as a lawyer at the 'sises. P'raps I'm going to tell him what you've been saying about her ladyship."

"You——"

"There, hold off, keeper, and—do you hear?—keep that dog quiet if you want it to live."

The man's hand had gone into his pocket again for the knife, Bess, seeing her master's anger, having sprung forward with a growl.

"Down, Bess, down!" cried the keeper.

"There, you needn't be scared, as you call it. I don't s'pose I shall tell tales about you—unless it pays me. P'raps I've got a better game on than that. Look here, keeper: you've got to tell Sir Harry I want to see him."

"What for?"

"Never you mind. He's just married. I know all about it, you see, and about the captain and all of it; and I'm going back to London by rail, I am, with a good soot o' clothes on my back."

The keeper stared at the man uneasily.

"Now, then, how are you going to do it? Tell him Abel Pollock, of the old Hundred and Tenth, wants to see him."

"You haven't been a soldier."

"Haven't I, keeper? Why, I was all through the Mutiny with Sir Harry, as was only Colonel Fanshaw then. He'll know me in a jiffy. He hasn't forgot his old servant, I know."

The keeper fidgeted with his gun, for the man's words made him uneasy. He had spoken with a leer, and now and then he seemed to emphasise his words with a cunning wink, as if to make the keeper understand that he knew a great deal that he could tell if he liked.

"I'm in no hurry, keeper, only if I am to be kept waiting I should like a pipe of tobacco."

Burton did not respond, only stood scanning the fellow over; and in his blunt, honest mind a score of uneasy thoughts kept chasing each other through his mind.

Suppose this fellow had got hold of something that related to his old colonel's past life—and probably he had, as his presence showed—what a task he was undertaking to introduce the repulsive-looking scoundrel to his master's presence. And then there was his handsome young wife, and his visitors. It might be terrible; and at last, almost in despair, he said—

"Look here, you'd better write to Sir Harry. I'm not going to take you to him."

"Oh yes, you are," said the man, with a sly, ugly look; "you're a-going to take me, keeper. In private, too. Let me see: there's the other general, Sir Robert Fanshaw, just come home from the Indies, at the house, and young Miss Judith, and Captain Carleigli, whose regiment's been at the Cape; and her new ladyship. You see, I know all about what company we keep."

"I tell you, if you want to see Sir Harry, you must write."

"Lor'! if I didn't forget the Yankee gent, keeper, that I did. There's him, too. Now I put it to you: it wouldn't look nice for me to be tumbling right in on Sir Harry dressed like this, now would it? It would shock him to see his Abel so hard up. Lor'! keeper, what tales I could tell you about Sir Harry when he was in Bengal! Them were days, and no mistake."

"How came you so hard up?" said Burton, to temporise, for a vague notion was coming upon him that there was something wrong, and that he might be doing a serious injury to his master by taking this man to him suddenly.

"Luck," said the fellow, passing his tongue over his dry lips, and looking thirstily about—acts that indicated another cause for his degenerate state.

"Look here," said Burton, brightening as an idea struck him. "My lodge is only about half a mile from here. You come up there and wait, and I'll go and tell Sir Harry where you are."

"Thankye, keeper, thankye. You are a man, you are. And you'll take me to your lodge?"

"Yes."

"And give me a crust of bread and cheese?—I'm rather peckish."

"Yes."

"And half a pint o' home-brewed?"

"Yes, I've got some beer."

"Thankye kindly, keeper; but I don't want to sit waiting there till you come back with P.C. number nine thousand seven hundred and forty-four, Yorkshire county constabulary. I'll have my bit by-and-by. Look here, keeper, no nonsense. I'm going to make you take me straight to Sir Harry, now at once—'tooty sweet,' as the French soldiers used to say."

"I wean't do it," said the keeper, sturdily. "Now, look here. I don't know whether what you say's true, but I know my dooty, and that is to see you off our grounds; so, come—pack."

Burton's nervous anxiety had passed off, and he was sturdily about to do what he told himself was right.

"Look here, keeper," said the man, thrusting forward his face in an ugly way, "are you going to take me straight to Sir Harry to have it out?"

"No!" said the keeper.

"Suppose I tell all I heard to-day?"

"You can tell if you care to," said Burton. "You don't bully me into doing what I don't like."

"All right. Pr'aps I shan't tell," said the fellow, with a sneer. "I've a better card to play than that. Your card is a small trump, and I've got the ace in my pocket. I s'pose you can play cards?"

"Never you mind what I can do. Me and my dog's going to see you off these grounds."

"All right, keeper; but I'll try you once more: it'll be better for all parties. Will you take me to my old colonel straight?"

"No!"

"Then here goes. I see Lady Fanshaw and the young miss drove out to Brackley town in the pony-trap. I'll go and meet them, and see what her ladyship will say."

CHAPTER IX.

ABEL POLLOCK LURKS IN THE GLEN.

"No, I haven't tramped down all this way for nothing, master poacher-trap," said Abel Pollock to himself; "and it seems to me that I've struck ile."

The ill-looking scoundrel thrust his hands deep into his pockets and went on, with the tall bracken rustling against his legs as he ploughed his way through the glorious wood.

"Might have give me a bit o' bacca, hang him! Thought I was after his fezzans and hares. Ha! ha! I think I know a trick worth two of that. My! what a man may pick up by just lying about! They can't charge you with stealing information and picking knowledge. They pack close in your head, and nobody can't find them

if they search you: and when you've got hold of 'em you can sell 'em to the right parties, and——"

He rubbed his hands together—a pair of very dirty, soft hands, that looked as if they had never done a hard day's work—and the cunning smile that came over his face was not a pleasant one to see.

In fact, strong as the term may seem, Abel Pollock was a complete blot on the beautiful woodland scene; and Samuel Burton, Sir Harry Fanshaw's keeper, was quite justified in looking upon him with suspicion.

In fact, the latter was standing, leaning upon his gun, thinking, and the setter Bess gazing up at him from her great liquid eyes, as if asking whether she was to track the fellow down.

Burton was a thorough specimen of an English keeper who had spent his life getting a few ideas in his head relating to rearing game and protecting it against enemies. Any vacant space left in his brain was so filled up by his love affair that he found it hard work to settle upon what he ought to do in the present emergency.

"That blackguard," he said to himself again, "has got hold of something agen Sir Harry; and, if he can't see him, he'll wait for her ladyship, and scar' her and Miss Judith out of their wits. Wean't do, my lad; I'll tak' him up to Sir Harry; and if I've done wrong it's better than letting him go and tell my lady. Here! Hoi!"

Bess leaped up and gave a loud bark, while Abel Pollock, who had heard the distant hail, turned round slowly and waited till the keeper came up.

"Well, what is it? Ain't this the shortest way?"

"Come up to the house."

"What for?"

"See Sir Harry."

"No; you wouldn't take me up when I wanted you to. I'm going to see the pretty little ladyship now."

He turned to go, but Burton clapped his strong brown hand upon his shoulder and stopped him.

The fellow flung himself free, and in an instant again snatched the knife from his pocket—the long-handled clasp-knife—which shook open and snapped with a spring, forming an ugly weapon.

"Keep off," he cried, hoarsely; "when men comes at me with guns I takes care o' myself. You keep your hands off me."

"Down, Bess, old lass, down!" said the keeper, for the long hair about the dog's neck was growing erect, and there was an angry look in her eyes. "Look here, my lad," he continued, "I'm not scarred o' that knife, and, if it come to that, I could put thee on thy back wi'out a touch. I'm not going to let a chap like thou go lying in wait for the ladies. You come on up to the house."

The man looked at the dog, next at the keeper's sturdy frame and resolute bearing, hesitated for a moment, and then, pressing a spring, the long ugly blade dropped loosely over his fingers, and he thrust the knife in his pocket.

"All right, keeper; I don't want to fight. I had enough o' that with Sir Harry in the Indies. Come on, then; I'll go up to the house, and you shall get me a glass of ale to wash the dust out of my throat before I see the colonel."

"Gen'ral," said Burton, gruffly. "Here, this way!"

"All right! He was colonel when we were together; and I say, keeper, what a life we used to have!"

"This way, I tell 'ee," growled the keeper, who resented more and more the familiarities of his companion; and, leading the way, the rough fellow followed with the dog close at his heels, sniffing at them uneasily, and looking ready at any moment to fix two glistening rows of teeth in his ragged leg.

The way was across the wood, whose grand, gnarled oaks spread their huge arms in every direction as they descended a steep slope, opening out now and then to give a view of the distant moorlands, with their rugged outlines of millstone grit, while here and there the clear sky was blurred by clouds that seemed to rise from amid the hills, significant of the existence of the busy manufacturing towns that nightly sent up a ruddy glow.

"Sir Harry's got a nice place here, keeper."

"This way," said the latter, gruffly; and he turned down at once into a deep ravine, whose sides were dotted with patches of alder, hazel, and furze, showing where the land was springy, or where the rock cropped out.

At the bottom the growth of the hazel shrubs was most luxuriant, and here one of the many clear streamlets of the hilly region ran bubbling and sparkling amongst masses of rock and piles of mossy stones.

Nature ruled almost uninterruptedly, but art had been called in to make a few dams of stone across the little stream, which they turned and forced into several winding channels, which met again and divided, and turned the whole bottom into a lovely wilderness full of dancing and falling water. Here the streamlets foamed and sparkled in the warm sunshine; there they glided in and out among gnarled ash-stumps and blocks of mossy stone in comparative darkness, or lit up by showers of sunny rays; and, as they reached one little limpid pool, the rough fellow threw himself down upon his chest, placed his lips to the water, and took a long deep draught.

"See that trout flash off, keeper?" he said, as he rose and wiped his lips with the back of his hand. "I could ha' tickled that if I'd been a poacher, as you thought I was."

"This way," growled Burton.

"All right, keeper, don't hurry yourself. Not bad stuff, water, when you can't get beer. Ah! nice place this."

He stopped, gazing curiously along the shadowy dell, musical with plashing water, cool, solemn, and strange, carved as it was by the hand of ages, deep down in a rift between the hills. And as he gazed about he saw that the bracken grew tall and seemed frosted with

silver in the drier parts, and the reeds and sedges were luxuriant where the alders affected the moister portions by the side of the water. In a pool, here and there, water-lilies had been planted, while right up the steep sides there was a dense growth of young ash and beech, produced by cutting the older trees level with the ground.

"Now then, are you coming?" said the keeper, fiercely.

"Oh, yes, I'm coming, my hearty," said Pollock; and he followed his guide in and out, over stepping-stones, and along mossy paths that had been cut in the most picturesque manner, so that nature should seem as if untouched.

As they crossed one streamlet they were in face of a rustic seat, placed beneath a perfect arbour of overhanging boughs: and just across the water the hazels and ash-boughs seemed to interlace above a perfect bed of bracken; while down amongst the stones that formed the streamlet's bank ferns of many patterns—lacework of brilliant greens—spread their broad fronds in endless profusion.

The place had a strange attraction for the rough-looking scoundrel, and, pointing back across the stream among the bracken in the shadowy patch,

"What a place for a good nap on a hot day, keeper, eh?" he said.

"Don't you try it, my lad," said Burton, sturdily. "Say what you want to say to Sir Harry when I've took you to him, and then set off while your shoes are good."

"All right, keeper; don't be so huffy about it. I say, old man, what a place for courting of an evening, eh? You should bring your lass down here some night."

Burton turned sharply round upon him—so fiercely that the fellow stepped back.

"Oh! all right—go on. I won't say any more."

He kept silence as he followed the keeper along the narrow, bowery paths, with fern and moss beneath their feet; but the fellow's eyes kept wandering strangely about the place at the meandering streams gurgling along their narrow, stony beds, beneath crumbling, over-arching, stony banks, which in places they undermined, so that here and there they had fallen in, choking the tiny streams, and sending them bubbling and foaming other ways.

"This way," said the keeper, stopping and holding open a rustic gate in a fence formed of tree-stumps and masses of stone, in whose interstices ferns and woodland plants had been set, till all formality had disappeared; but, once through the gate, Abel Pollock found himself at the bottom of a slope in extensive, well-kept grounds, where soft, grassy paths wandered amongst huge forest-trees which had been carefully preserved, while beyond the spread of these mighty boughs patches of shrubbery diversified the scene.

The keeper kept along the bottom of the slope, walking pretty fast, and as his companion followed him he kept catching glimpses

of the house—a long, low, reddish stone building, with heavy mullioned windows, battlemented roof, and everywhere covered with trellises, or a dense growth of ivy and other creeping plants.

“Lucky to be a general,” muttered the fellow, as, with quick eye, he noted the smooth lawn and masses of brilliant flowers; the old stone terrace wall, with its vases, which seemed running over with brightly-tinted blossoms; the garden-seats, the small military tent, draped up to show table and chairs, and the many other traces of luxury appertaining to a well-kept English mansion.

“I’d bet sixpence the old monks built this place, eh, keeper?”

“Priory,” he said, with a surly intonation; and now, after skirting round the house, he led his companion along a shady, bower-like path to a side-door, where he rang a bell.

“If I tell Josephs this chap wants to see Sir Harry he won’t have him in, I know.”

A grey-haired servant out of livery came to the door, glanced at Pollock, and then at the keeper.

“Want to see Sir Harry?”

“Yes; is he in?”

The butler nodded and went away, to return directly and sign to them to follow him along a broad passage where the walls were covered with pictures, and across a glistening oak-floored hall whose sides were panelled with carved work, while heads of deer, suits of armour, and trophies of warlike weapons were arranged in niches, and looked richly effective as seen by the light that streamed through the stained-glass windows of the lofty place.

The butler opened a black oak door, and ushered the keeper and his companion into a large, gloomy room, the walls of which were covered with book-shelves, while the tables were burdened with heaps of volumes that seemed as if they were rarely touched.

The first to enter the room was the dog, which trotted up to the handsome, grey-haired, elderly man, its occupant, and thrust its long pointed nose into his hand.

“Ah, Bess,” he said; “good dog! Well, Burton, what’s this?”

He rose from the easy-chair where he had been reading, threw down his book, and walked to the great fireplace with its carved mantel, turned his back to it, and stood there in stiff military guise, gazing from one to the other.

“This man, Sir Harry,” began the keeper.

Sir Harry turned his eye sharply upon the man, who drew himself up smartly, saluted *à la militaire*, and then clapped his hands together and stood at ease.

“Soldier, eh?” said Sir Harry.

“Yes, Colonel—Abel Pollock, old Hundred and Tenth. Your old servant afore Delhi.”

“What’s he been doing, Burton—poaching?”

“No, Sir Harry, trespassing on our grounds. I found him in Oak Wood. Says he wants to see you, Sir Harry.”

"Then, sir, why didn't you come to the door?" said Sir Harry, in the sharp, military manner of an officer.

"Been turned away, Colonel. Look at me."

"Yes. Disgraceful, sir! Why are you in this condition?"

"Ah," thought Burton, "if I'd know'd this I wouldn't have brought him up."

"Condition?" said the man, with a cool stare; "what condition do you expect an old soldier to be in?"

"Where's your pension?"

"Didn't get none, Colonel."

"No; I remember. You were a drunken dog, sir—a disgrace to the regiment."

"Yes, Colonel."

"You'd have been drummed out, but we wanted men."

"Yes, Colonel."

"And you could fight."

"Yes, Colonel. 'Member the days when we were surprised by the niggers in that plain?"

"Silence, sir! 'Tention!"

The man sprang up, with his hands down to his side, and stood straight before him.

"Why have you come down here, sir?"

"Why have I come down, Colonel? Well, look at me. I'm 'bout starved."

"Ha! yes. This comes of the drink."

"Yes, Colonel."

"It's your own fault, then."

"No, Colonel—fault of your system."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"You give a soldier no chance, Colonel. I'd have been a better man if your system had been right. It was always drilled to the nines; barked at by a bullying sergeant; poorly fed; tied up by discipline like a dog; and when the red tape got loose, and a fellow was free, why, he runs to the drink. It seems the only chance he has, and he takes it."

"Humph! And nicely it pays you back," said Sir Harry, sharply.

"Well, I don't like to see a brave fellow who has worn Her Majesty's uniform down in the dust—going to the dogs like this. What do you want me to do for you?"

"Well, you see, Sir Harry, I thought if I could get hold of a pound or two I might buy a basket and sell something about the country, so as to get a bit to eat."

"A drop to drink, I'm afraid you mean, Pollock," said Sir Harry, sternly. "Well, I won't see an old soldier starve. There's something to make a start with, and you may let me know how you get on. If you'd left the drink alone you would have had a pension."

As he spoke Sir Harry took a crisp new five-pound note from his

pocket-book, and held it out to the man, who took it, doubled it up small, and placed it in his brass tobacco-box.

"Thanky, kindly, Colonel," he said, hoarsely; "and I won't forget this here."

"Do you want to show me your gratitude?" said Sir Harry, sharply.

"Yes, Colonel."

"Then make good use of that money, and get yourself an honest living. Now go. Burton, take this man to the servants' hall, and let him have a good meal. Let him be treated with respect, for he was a brave soldier—once."

"Yes, Sir Harry," and the keeper went back to the door, followed by Pollock, who muttered to himself—

"A fiver, eh? Ah, well, it'll do for the present, and then—eh?"

"I thought you were going to tell Sir Harry about old times?" said Burton.

"Oh, all right, keeper. He was square to me and friendly, so I held my tongue. If he'd cut up rough then you'd have seen."

Mr. Abel Pollock, a richer man by five pounds, and a happier man for having eaten heartily of the Priory beef, and drunk as much ale as he pleased, was finally seen off the premises by the keeper.

This he resented by insolent look and bitter word.

"I'm not going to pick up a hare as I go, keeper," he said, with a half-tipsy smile.

"No," replied Burton, "you are not; and now you take my advice: don't you come down here again till you can show the General that you have done some good."

They were some little distance beyond the park gates, out towards the cross-roads, one of which led to Brackley town.

Pollock turned a curious, leering look upon the keeper.

"Not come back till I've something to show, keeper?"

Thup, thup, thup.

Three loud-sounding snaps of the finger in the keeper's face, and, accompanying them, a slow, offensive wink.

Just then there was a sharp sound of wheels, and the rapid patter of ponies' feet beyond the trees at a curve of the road.

The keeper involuntarily drew aside on to the grass, and the dog grew excited and uttered a low bark.

The next minute a low carriage, drawn by two spirited little ponies, swept by, driven by a lady whose handsome face was slightly flushed by the sunny air and the excitement of controlling the beautiful little steeds.

Beside her, but leaning back, sat Judith Nesbitt, with a pleasant smile on her parted lips, consequent upon some remark just made by her cousin, Sir Harry Fanshaw's young wife.

The keeper touched his hat, the dog uttered another bark, ran a few yards after the carriage, and then, yielding to discipline, trotted back.

Abel Pollock had gone on a few yards, and then stopped till the keeper turned from gazing after the pony-carriage.

"I say, keeper," he said, "not come back, eh?"

He pointed with his thumb over his shoulder at the figures in the distance.

"What do you mean?" said Burton, fiercely.

"We know, my lad—we know ears is made to hear, and eyes is made to see, and brains is made to get us money out of what we know. Five pounds ain't a large fortune, keeper. There, go and look after your little Milly, and if I was you I should give Captain—eh? Good-bye."

He went off at a swinging pace, with the dog staring after him, and giving vent to a deep-mouthed bay; while his master's brow wrinkled up horizontally with indignation.

"He knows too much," he growled. "I think she likes me; but she plays wi' me a strange deal. What did she say—'I wean't marry an owd man and have a grey husband.'"

He took off his hat and involuntarily ran his hand through his hair.

"Not so grey, either. She's only nineteen, and I'm forty. Twice as old as she, but I feel only a youngish man. Like Sir Harry, eh? And him talking about the captain. Blame the captain! I wish they'd send him abroad, or let him get married. Quiet, Bess! Down, owd lass. He has gone now."

The dog whined uneasily, and gazed after the departing figure just turning the corner of the road, while her master was looking after the pony-carriage.

"She's a sweet lady, and that shack must have seen something, as well as knowed a deal about Sir Harry, but—oh, I wean't think such things of 'em. They're all friends together, and the captain's like Sir Harry's son, and she's like sister to him. I say," he cried aloud, staring round as if defending his master against some body of accusers, "her ladyship's a true English lady, and I think it shame of any one to get dropping hints about her, and I'm about shamed o' mysen for getting such a fancy in my head, and all along of a shack like that. Here, Bess, lass, let's go home. I suppose that chap's gone."

The dog whined and gazed along the road, as if not so satisfied in her mind as her master seemed to be, for there was a rustle a short distance onward in the wood.

CHAPTER X.

DRAWING TOGETHER.

"FEEL it cold, Bob?"

"Cold? Nonsense!"

"Thought you might, perhaps, coming from your hot regions."

Sir Harry Fanshaw and his brother were seated in the long low dining-room of the Priory, over their claret. The windows were open, looking out on to the lawn, and the soft, dewy, summer-evening breeze bore in the scent of the flowers.

"No, Harry ; I'm not cold. What lovely weather ! Young folks seem to be enjoying themselves. Here, I want to smoke."

Sir Harry passed his cigar-case, but Sir Robert shook his head.

"No," said the latter ; "I'm going to spoil a *tête-à-tête* while I can."

He clapped his hands ; and from the lawn, where voices could be heard, though the speakers were unseen, a light figure came in quickly by the French window to exclaim—

"You want your pipe, uncle ?"

"Right, Judy !"

"What a shame to make her fetch it !" said Sir Harry, as the girl ran from the room.

"Not it ! It's as sweet again when she fills and lights it. Harry, boy, I don't know what I shall do when that girl marries and leaves me."

"As she will," said Sir Harry. "By the way, we may as well have a chat about George."

"Humph ! Very well. Wait till she's gone. You see, Harry, I shan't be like you—with a wife."

"No," said Sir Harry, softly, and a flush came into his handsome, elderly face. "My dear brother: I wish you could enjoy my happiness."

"Then you are satisfied with your step ?"

"Satisfied ? My dear Bob, could a woman be more beautiful and sweet ?"

"No."

"More tender and devoted ?"

"No."

"Then why should I not be satisfied ? My dear Bob, my love for her—don't think me conceited !—has all the passion of youth, all the restraint of middle age, and all the tender, fatherly feeling of an old man. My dear brother," he continued, in a voice that was deep with emotion, "it is the one thing for which I live, to try and make up by devotion for the disparity of our ages."

"God bless you both, Harry ! She's as sweet as she is fair, and—— Hist ! here's Judy."

As Sir Robert spoke the girl tripped in, bearing a large, ugly Eastern pipe, with a long coiled-up stem, and an erect bowl stuck in a china vessel of rose-water.

"There, uncle," she cried, placing it before him, uncoiling the stem, and then, when he was ready, lighting a match and holding it to the tobacco with which the bowl was filled.

"Alight, uncle ?"

"All right, Judy. There, you may go."

"Why don't you try a hubble-bubble, Uncle Harry ?"

"Because I'm an Englishman, Judy. There, be off to your croquet. Uncle Robert shall not interrupt you again."

Judy merrily ruffled her uncle's hair, and then ran out through the open window.

"Here, Harry," said Sir Robert, "I've made a mistake in coming here. I'm not going to have her marry and leave me. I shall stop it all."

"Try making Brackley River run the other way first, Bob. Nature's nature, my lad. While we old fogies are sitting smoking here, listening to the click of those croquet balls, love is hard at work settling the whole affair. George is a fine dashing fellow, Bob, and he'll make her a good husband."

"My dear Harry, it is none of my doing, and I don't want to cross your plans, but it seems to me that the American is making the running."

"What, Range? My dear Bob! Absurd!"

"I don't know about absurd, Harry. You're set upon George having her."

"I am indeed, my dear fellow. It is one of the dreams of my life."

"Then, thank goodness! it was you who brought Range here."

"No, no; it was you brought him, Bob."

"I?"

"Well, yes, indirectly. As I told you, we met him at Salzbingen, and he began talking about knowing you, and that warmed us up towards him. By Jove! I like the young fellow. There's something new about him. Frank and generous: his money hasn't spoiled him."

"Just what I think of him. He's a bit rough, but I don't mind that, for he's honest."

"But not a gentleman."

"Not by birth, Harry, but certainly a gentleman at heart."

"Oh, yes, of course. But you couldn't let him marry Judy, Bob, and take her away to America."

"If she's to be taken away," said Sir Robert, dolefully, "it doesn't much matter where she goes in these travelling days."

"My dear Bob, I don't think we need discuss the matter. George loves the girl, and I think we ought to consider the affair as settled. Alice says, perhaps we ought to wait, but——"

"I agree with Alice. Besides, I don't think Judy cares for George at all."

"You think she cares for Range? Now look here, my dear Bob, you are a splendid fellow at managing a brigade, but you know no more about women than that hubble-bubble. I tell you, Judith does not care for Range."

"How do you know?"

"By quietly looking on. I know George has settled it in his own mind that he is to marry Judith; and he is of such a quick, jealous temperament that if there were anything in that direction he would be uneasy directly."

"Well, isn't he?"

"Pooh! not a bit. There, I'd lay a wager—if I were a betting-

man—that at the present moment he is neglecting the game of croquet and chatting with my wife.”

“And Range is talking to Judy?”

“Without a doubt. He spends a good deal of time with her—the natural gravitation of young people together; but you may take my word for it that if we could hear their conversation it would not contain a word about love.”

“P'r'aps you're right,” said Sir Robert; and then to himself: “but if it doesn't, Range isn't so sharp a fellow as I took him for.”

The brothers relapsed into silence; for Sir Harry, as the host, felt a delicacy about pressing the matter further, and in the fast-closing evening they sat smoking placidly, with the moths from the grand old garden flitting in and out through the open window.

“Thank goodness!” said Sir Robert to himself. “Back home in dear old Yorkshire; and there's no place like home. I wish Judy had brought me a cushion for my back.”

“Heaven be thanked!” mused Sir Harry, “my journey onward can't be long; but after life's hard struggle and risk I am calmly settled here with my sweet young wife, in my dear old country home; and what am I, to deserve such peace and bliss? My life is blessed. Thank God! thank God!”

The soft serenity of the delicious summer evening was moving the spirits of the two men as such a summer evening will. The heat was great; but with it there was a soft moisture that robbed it of its oppressiveness. But as they sat in silence, gazing out through the clouds of thin blue smoke from cigar and pipe, other clouds were forming—clouds atmospheric, clouds social.

Down in the south there was a faint haze, about which a few tremulous flashes of lightning kept playing.

The other clouds were in and about the lives of the young party on the lawn.

“Never mind the game,” said Captain Carleigh, “the evening is so delightful. Let's have a stroll down to the Wilderness.”

“But it will be damp,” said Lady Fanshaw, glancing at her guests.

“What, on a night like this? Nonsense! And, besides, after a couple of years of Africa and drought I worship water.”

“But Mr. Range and Judith will think it rude.”

“Rude? How have they behaved to us? I'm sick of it. The game has been a perfect farce. They have done nothing but talk and stroll away from the ground.”

“I thought so,” said Lady Fanshaw, smiling archly, and she turned her large dark eyes once more upon her companion.

“What do you mean?” he said eagerly.

“You are growing jealous of Mr. Range's attentions to Judith. You must take care, George, or you may lose her.”

“How can you speak to me like that?” he said, in a low earnest voice. “Have you no feeling? Do you think I am made of stone?”

"Oh! hush, hush!" she replied, playfully. "Any one would think these were the old days before you went out to the Cape."

"Yes, and I was happy in the smiles of Alice Wyndham."

"Who is now Lady Fanshaw, your hostess. Why, George, you ought almost to call me 'mamma.'"

"In the days," he continued, "when you led me on to hope."

"And you spoke soft nonsense to me that you did not mean," she replied, merrily.

"Not mean?" he cried. "Oh! this is cruel!"

"Precisely the same things that you said to half a dozen ladies I could name. Now, no more trifling! You do not for a moment believe me to be so weak as to place any faith in the position you have taken up. Those forlorn looks ill-become you: they even make you seem ridiculous. Come, remember how our positions are changed."

"I cannot—it is impossible!" he cried, fiercely.

"You must, and it is possible. Now, do you know, George Carleigh, I have not known you from childhood without being able to thoroughly analyse your character?"

"Analyse it, then."

"Well, I will, to this extent: if you had come back from the Cape and had found your old friend Alice Wyndham, to whom you have paid thousands of compliments, and with whom you have danced till we were tired—if you had found me, I say, to be had for the asking, you would have gone off, my handsome butterfly in scarlet and gold, to seek some other flower."

"Ah! you are unjust," he cried, bitterly.

"Not at all," she said, quickly; "it is the simple truth. Now then, be sensible! Because I am unattainable, your restless spirit prompts you to be very silly."

"I cannot bear this!"

"You must; and this," she continued: "I said your restless spirit prompts you to be very silly and to strive after the unattainable. You have said so much to me lately that I must speak more plainly. George Carleigh, I am Alice still, but Alice, Lady Fanshaw, the wife of the man who has been to you a second father. Now, as there is to be no more croquet, let us take a stroll through the Wilderness."

"They evidently do not mean to finish the game," said Judith, as she stood leaning on the handle of her croquet-mallet, looking exceedingly pretty in white against the great closely-clipped yew-hedge.

"Then let's have a stroll and talk," said Range. "This old place is delightful to me."

"But you've seen so many beautiful places," said Judith.

"Yes," he replied; "but there is something about an English velvety lawn, with its carefully-kept trees and flowers, that is

infinitely more beautiful. They are going down towards that hollow where the stream runs. Shall we follow them?"

"Yes," said Judith, quietly. "I don't think uncle will want me. He generally drops asleep after having his hookah, and he does not like to be disturbed."

"Let's go, then," said Range, taking in the soft, sweet form and the graceful drapery at a glance, before letting his eyes rest with reverent admiration upon the fair, innocent face.

"And you will go on telling me about that adventure with the Indians—when you and your uncle were hemmed in, you know?"

"Oh, no!" he said in a remonstrant tone; "I cannot tell you that."

"Why not?"

"It is making so much fuss about so little. It is like what we Americans call playing brag—boasting, you know."

"Oh no, Mr. Range, you never boast."

"Come along then," he said, "and I'll tell you. May I smoke?"

"Oh yes, I like the scent of your cigars."

He took out his case, but put it back.

"No," he said, smiling; "you say that out of politeness. It is selfish to smoke now."

Lady Fañshaw and Captain Carleigh were about fifty yards away, and, taking the same direction, Judith and Arthur Range strolled slowly down towards the Wilderness through which Burton the keeper had taken Abel Pollock, old soldier, modern tramp, a few hours before.

The place must have had an attraction for the latter, since, as soon as he was out of the keeper's sight, he had turned into the wood, waited an hour or two, and then made his way back to the little rocky ravine where the streams ran and the waterfalls made pleasant music to the ear.

Arriving here, he selected a spot among the bracken, close behind one of the seats, lay down, and the broad fronds drooped over his prostrate form.

"Snug place for a nap," he said, "and to improve one's mind."

Then he yawned and went to sleep.

Some time had elapsed before a brilliantly plumaged cock-pheasant, which was daintily picking its way about beneath the trees, suddenly drooped its tail, raised its head, listened, and then began to run.

The cause of its flight was the appearance of a couple of well-dressed men, in soft felt hats, one of whom carried a small sketching-book and a camp-stool; the other had a botanist's vasculum slung under his arm, and swung an umbrella.

Seen by the evening light, one seemed to be a clergyman, the other a doctor.

"Let's go back now," said the thinner of the two.

"Not yet, my dear Nathan," replied the other. "We must have a good knowledge of the enemy's camp before we begin the siege."

"But we may be seen, Shell."

"And if we are we have mistaken our path. 'Will you kindly direct us back to the Angler's Rest?'"

"But if we met him?"

"What then? He has never seen us. We can't be far from the house now. Come along. If we did meet him, it would only mean a slight change of plan: so, once more, come along!"

CHAPTER XI.

ABEL POLLOCK IS BUSY.

THE murmur of the water down in the Wilderness was delightfully soothing on that soft summer evening, when Abel Pollock woke from a long nap, as if by instinct, raised his head a little, and listened.

For there were voices coming down one of the paths; and, as he peered among the fern fronds, he drew in a breath full of satisfaction, for he could see Lady Fanshaw, with her eyes bent down upon the ground, listening to the eager conversation of Captain Carleigh.

"They'll come and sit down here," muttered Pollock, "and I shall hear every word. Five pound, eh! It's beginning to feel like five hundred from somebody—to—keep—my—tongue—quiet. Curse 'em, why couldn't they have sat down here?"

His thoughts had run slowly as he lay watching the approaching figures reach the rustic seat, hesitate, and then pass. His thoughts came swiftly with anger as the couple went on along the path, and he faintly heard Carleigh say—

"Come along farther. It is more beautiful in here."

"No; let us take this seat for a few minutes, and then go back," said Lady Fanshaw; and the captain obeyed with a gesture full of vexation.

"Who are these here?" muttered Pollock, as Judith and Range came slowly down the path to pause by the rustic seat, and, after glancing at Lady Fanshaw and Carleigh, they, too, sat down well in sight of the others; and so it happened that the two Americans, who were hidden behind some thickly-clothed nut-stubs, heard the conversation of Carleigh and Lady Fanshaw; while Pollock had to listen to Range, as, in a low tone, he told of his adventures when quite a boy, and he and his uncle had on several occasions been besieged in their rocky fastness or log-hut by the Indians.

"And do you like to hear all this?" Range said, in a half-amused manner, as he saw Judith's eager eyes fixed upon him intently.

"Like?" said Judith. "I love reading of such things even when I know they have only been invented by some clever writer. To hear you talk of what has really happened—oh, I could sit and listen for ever!"

"Could you?" he cried, surprised out of himself; and he laid one firm strong hand upon Judith's arm.

She did not shrink for a moment; then she withdrew her arm quickly and moved slightly away.

"Yes, I do want polish," said Range to himself. "No gentleman would have done that. I have gone back in her opinion."

"What!" he said aloud, and half bitterly, "you could listen for ever to an American telling such stories?"

"Yes," she said eagerly, and with girlish *naïveté*; "it is all so real and truthful."

"Then you don't think I was bragging and inventing?"

"Why should I, Mr. Range?" she replied. "I think you would be too much of a gentleman to impose upon a young girl's credulity."

"I wouldn't. On my soul, I wouldn't!" he cried, earnestly; "but I am not a gentleman, Miss Judith; and here I feel it more and more every day. Mine has been such a rough life—among rough people. Uncle and I lived for years with our lives not worth an hour's purchase. For years we never went to bed knowing that we should get up and see another day's sun."

"I should like to know your uncle," said Judith, ingenuously.

"Uncle Wash? I know you would. He's the dearest, truest, most generous old fellow that ever lived. He's very rough, though. I'm afraid he'd say things that would shock you, though his heart's as innocent as a child's, and the way he looks upon women is as if they were something holy."

"I should like to see him," said Judith, again.

"You're not likely to see him," said Range. "Your lives will be very far apart, unless some day the captain should make up his mind to bring you out for a trip to America. If he does, and you two don't make my home yours for as long as you'll both stay, there'll be one very sore heart in the United States, Miss Judith, and that will be mine."

Arthur Range had not noticed it, but Judith had been listening to him with her eyes fixed in the gathering gloom upon her cousin Alice, who was listening as intently as she to Carleigh's eager conversation; but Judith heard nothing thereof, on account of a little waterfall just by their feet, whose murmur drowned the captain's deep, earnest voice.

"It is time we went back to the house," said Judith, rising. Then, raising her voice: "Alice, dear, isn't it time for tea?"

Lady Fanshaw started up as if brought to herself by her cousin's words.

"Yes, dear; it is quite time," she cried. "Ah, Mr. Range! what have you been finding to talk about?" she continued, placing her hand upon his arm, and leaving Judith to follow with Carleigh.

"Mostly about myself," he said, bluntly. "That's about my only subject, Lady Fanshaw. I'm afraid you English people will think we are a terrible set of bores; but, as I've been telling Miss Nesbitt, my life has been almost entirely spent in the wilds."

"I think you are too fond of condemning yourself, Mr. Range,"

said Lady Fanshaw. "Perhaps, after all, it is better and more manly to be out and doing in the forest and mountain than hanging about drawing-rooms, flirting and talking nonsense with silly women whose heads are full of what people call love."

Range started to hear her speak so bitterly.

"But I often fancy that I am very uncouth."

"Then don't fancy so again," she said, smiling.

"Well, if, when I am gone, you don't think ill of me, I shall not care."

"But you are not going yet," she said, warmly. "We all like you very much, and hope you will stay."

"I did not like to interrupt you, Judith," said Carleigh, as they came slowly on behind Range and Lady Fanshaw; "you seemed so pleasantly engaged."

"I was," she replied, calmly, and piqued the captain into saying—

"And what has our American friend got to say?"

"To say? Oh, he has been telling me some of his adventures with the Indians."

"A new Othello before Desdemona," sneered Carleigh.

"An unhappy comparison, George Carleigh," replied Judith, in a firm, quiet tone.

"Oh! I beg pardon," he said sharply. "I meant no harm. How long is he going to stay?"

"Really I cannot tell," said Judith.

"Because I'm getting tired of him. I can't get a word with you now. It's too bad."

Judith turned and looked him so firmly in the eyes that he began to awaken to the fact that this was no weak, milk-and-water girl such as he had been accustomed to consider her, and the remainder of the walk up to the house was almost in silence.

"Bah!" muttered Pollock. "I haven't heard a pen'orth o' good. But never mind—better luck next time. Pst! who are they?"

"Not much learned this time, Shell," whispered the medical-looking man to his companion.

"No, my dear boy, not much," was the reply. "Better luck next time. It moves, Nathan; it moves. He's snug here for a time. We know that. Now let me take mine ease at mine inn."

Saying this, they walked pretty briskly towards the place where they were making a stay, tracked at a distance by Pollock, who was all eagerness to know their business, and to see which way they went.

CHAPTER XII.

FISHING FOR TROUT AND ———.

It was not by any means a difficult task to follow the two strangers through the dusk of the evening, for, after getting out into the road, they went unhesitatingly along, walking sharply over the hill till

they reached the Brackley river, which ran rapidly, gurgling down among the stones and beneath the overhanging trees.

Here they crossed the river by the old stone bridge, and entered a quaint little hostelry much frequented by anglers.

"If they're not watching me, what's their game?" said Pollock, as he saw them pass the bar, ornamented with stuffed trout and grayling. Directly afterwards a light appeared in a side-room, and, the blind not being down, he could see them take their places at a well-spread table.

"Nothing like taking the bull by the horns," muttered Pollock, and, entering the kitchen of the little inn, he called for a pint of ale. "I can pay my way now, and I may as well sleep here as anywhere else," he thought.

Abel Pollock's life had been of so unsatisfactory a character during the past few years that the feeling upon him was not whether he had done anything to offend the law, but what particular offence it was that had brought these strangers down to watch him.

"Well, I shan't run," he said; "if I do they'll only hunt me out; for the police arrangements all over the country are in a black-guardly state. A poor fellow can't go from one town to another without its being known. I shall stay here."

Nothing occurred that night; and the next morning, seeing the two strangers go out directly after breakfast to begin whipping the stream with all the clumsiness of complete amateurs, he contented himself with watching them, till, seeing Burton come strolling up the river bank towards where they were fishing, he drew back and went off out of sight, more puzzled than ever, but with his ideas strengthened that these men were after him, and had made an appointment with Burton to hear a little more about his proceedings.

A guilty conscience needs no accuser, and Abel Pollock would have been both puzzled and astounded if he had heard the conversation that took place when the keeper sauntered up; for his first words were—

"Well gentlemen, much sport?"

"Sport? No," said the clerical-looking man, smiling blandly. "I say, now, tell me are there really any fish in this river?"

"Fish in this river?"

"Yes; the landlord says there are plenty of good trout, and we've been throwing flies for hours without a rise."

Burton chuckled a little.

"Throw again, sir," he said—"there, up towards that bush; there's most likely a good one lying there."

The clerical-looking man made a clumsy cast, and his companion tried to do likewise, but with less success than his friend; for, while the former succeeded in making a bit of a splash some distance out, the latter caught his fly in the grass behind him, and had to go and unfasten the tangle that ensued.

"There's no catching trouts or graylings that way, sir," said Burton, smiling. "Let me show you."

He took the long, light rod, drew out some more line, examined the fly, and then, letting the point of the rod form a letter S in the air, he made an apparently effortless cast, sent the fly out to the extreme length of the line, and let it fall like a feather upon the water.

"Hah! I thought so," said Burton, as there was a ring on the surface. "He's there, but he rose short."

He cast again, the fly falling close to the part where there was a little eddy in the clear water; then there was a quick rise, a turn of the keeper's wrist, a violent splashing, and he handed the rod to its owner.

"There you are, sir. You see there are trout. They only want catching."

"Ah, of course; and you're experienced, and I know nothing about it. Come out, sir, come out, come along! There, he's gone!"

"Gone! Yes, sir," chuckled Burton; "but you ought to have managed to land him."

"Oh, it don't matter, keeper. I've only come out for a bit of a change—country air, you know. Nice place all about here. Have a cigar?"

"Thankye, sir. You won't mind me cutting it up? I always smoke a pipe."

"Have some tobacco, then?"

"Thankye, sir," said Burton, accepting a handful of golden, mossy-looking weed from an india-rubber bag. "Yes, it's a nice place all about here."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes, sir—Sir Harry Fanshaw's: just over the hill. Bit of this river comes through our grounds."

"Sir Harry Fanshaw, eh? Oh, I know! Where the old lodges are, with the ivy over the chimney?"

"That's the place, sir."

"We saw him yesterday, don't you remember? Good-looking young fellow, with brown beard and moustache, walking with a fair lady. You remember, Nathan?"

"No, no, no!" said Burton; "that's Mr. Range—'Merican gent staying at the house. The lady was Miss Nesbitt."

"Then the dark military gentleman with the dark lady was Sir Harry?"

"No, sir, that's the captain—master's sort o' ward, you know. That was her ladyship, though," added the keeper.

"Oh, I see. Why don't you fill your pipe? That's good tobacco."

"Oh, I ought to be getting back, sir," said Burton, filling an old black pipe; "but I'll smoke for a few minutes, and see you catch another trout."

"Oh, never mind the trout. I'll have a cigar and a chat for a change."

He suited the action to the word, and then held the light to the keeper, who was soon puffing away contentedly, while the two anglers made a few idle casts.

"What sort of a man's Sir Harry, eh?"

"Quite old gentleman, sir, with white hair."

"Think he'd give us leave to have a few casts in his private part of the river?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He'd give you leave if you asked him."

"Because he'd know we shouldn't catch any fish, eh?"

"Well, I don't think, begging your pardon, gents, as you'd ketch many. Our trout takes a lot of catching; but, if you like to ask, I shall be set to tend you, and I'll see as you get a few."

"Captain fish much?"

"No, sir; he only shoots—being a soldier," added Burton, as if it were a good joke.

"Ah, I see. American gentleman clever with the rod?"

"Not he, sir. Seems to like taking walks with the ladies, and reading to 'em, and getting out by himself in the woods to read poetry, right out aloud."

"You don't say so!" said the clerical-looking man, with a sharp glance at his companion, who stuck the spear of his rod into the ground and prepared his own pipe.

"Oh, yes, sir. I never see a gentleman so fond of reading out aloud to himself."

"Going on the stage, perhaps?"

"Not he, sir. They say he's as rich as half a dozen Jews. No, I don't know what it means, 'less it's to make himself more of a scholar like."

"And he reads out aloud in the woods, eh?"

"Yes, sir; I often run again him. Nice gent though. Always got a kind word for you and a coin."

"Well, I don't think we'll ask leave, as Sir Harry has two visitors in the house. We may come down again in a few days, and he'll be gone."

"Not he, sir," said Burton. "I shouldn't wonder if he were to stop another month or two for the shooting."

"Shooting?"

"Yes, sir; the birds, sir. Time's going on. If you think anything of it, you write a line to Sir Harry, and say you're gents from London; he'll give you leave directly. Fair sport in anybody's what he likes—shooting, fishing, hunting. He finds plenty of 'em for his friends. Never does anything of the kind himself."

"Ah, well! perhaps we'll ask him, keeper."

"Do, sir, do; and now I must be off. Look here, sir, just give your line a wave like that, and then send your fly right out over the water, so as it drops like a flake o' snaw. There, that's the way, sir. It'll come easy if you try."

Burton gave the strangers another lesson, and then went on along the side of the beautiful river, leaving the two fly-fishers making abortive casts till he was out of sight.

"That will do, Nathan," said the clerical-looking man. "We've earthed him, and he's likely to stay."

"And goes out alone in the woods, Shell."

"Yes; that may be useful. Come along."

"What are you going to do?"

"Going to do, man? Why, make our hay while the sun shines. He's safe for a week, at all events; and, as he has not seen us, let's get away and come down again."

"Why not write and let Jack take the house? It would save the fares."

"My parsimonious old prophet, do leave off being so penny wise and pound foolish. What is more, do learn to have a little more confidence in my judgment. Come along."

"Going?—so soon, gentlemen?" said the landlord, who, as fortune had it, handed them a telegram when they reached the inn.

"Yes," said the clerical gentleman, after a glance at the telegram. "We were going to see why this telegram had not come. Now it has come it calls us back."

"I wish telegrams, as they calls 'em, had never been invented," said the landlord to himself, in a surly growl. "They're going, and my rooms 'll be empty again."

Abel Pollock—by accident, of course—took a seat outside under the fly-fishers' window, where his head dropped on to his chest, and he went off fast asleep, breathing heavily, while a rapid conversation went on inside between the two gentlemen.

They spoke in low, eager voices, and it must have been a peculiar tone, for most of the words penetrated through the muslin blind and made their way into the sleeper's brain.

The first words were relating to payments of bills and expenses running up, and the words were querulous.

Then they were of a more interesting nature, for one said—

"The fruit's ripe, and we can nab him now. Nothing could have happened better. I tell you, Nathan, if I'd picked my place I could not have chosen one more suitable."

"You still mean to go on with it?"

"Go on with it!"

There was a pause here, and the sleeper felt uncommonly warm, then chilly and damp.

"What can it be for?" he thought. "It's a puzzler. They're detectives, safe, and they've followed me down here."

"Well," continued one of the voices, "I suppose you are right. But wouldn't the rail be better?"

"Rail? No. A trap, my boy. There, there, Nathan, you leave it all to me, and go on paying. You shall have such a percentage

for it all, my lad, as will make your eyes twinkle. Now, then, hey for town, and then——”

“Yes, then?”

“It’s all right, my boy; and if things don’t turn out perfect you tell me. Now, then, let’s be off.”

The dog-cart came round just then, and, as if troubled by the sunshine, Abel Pollock woke up and choose a fresh place, which he retained till the two strangers had mounted into the cart and were being driven over the hills to the nearest station.

As soon as they were out of sight, Abel Pollock began to think—hard.

“I’ve drunk,” he muttered, “till my head’s grown thick as thick, but I’m beginning to see it all. They’re not after me, and they’re not detectives. It’s swag; that’s what it is. They’re Londoners, and they mean business. What did that chap say—a trap? And the other said the rail. What does it mean—the plate?”

“No,” he said, after a pause; “it’s the jewels—Ladyship’s diamonds. Now, then, Abel Pollock, my lad, you’re no coward. What’s your game—split or stand in?”

There was a good half-hour’s thought here.

“If I split, the police’ll have all the credit for taking ’em, and I shall get a fi’pun note for my pains. Abel Pollock, my lad, things are beginning to shine for you. You’ve got to stay down here, and stand in for a third share.”

Then after another pause—

“I wonder when they’ll come! Well, I’ll watch!”

CHAPTER XIII.

UNPLEASANT.

“WONDER what Uncle Wash would say to me?” said Range to himself, as he stood in the path close to the drawing-room window, listening to a brilliantly played piano, the sparkling tones of which came through the open casement.

The place was bathed in sunlight, which seemed to silver many of the trees, notably a great drooping ash, beneath which the two old generals were seated at a table, Sir Robert with his hubble-bubble and Sir Harry listening to his brother and putting in a word now and then.

“Old boys are fighting their battles o’er again. Miss Nesbitt—Miss Judith—Judith—Judy is practising, and I’ve no excuse for going in.”

He ran through this list of appellatives slowly, dwelling more and more upon each till the last, and then he said again—

“Wonder what Uncle Wash would say to me if he saw how I’m going on?”

“Let’s see; now ten-thirty. Croquet at eleven-thirty. I’ll go

and read Tennyson out in the wood. Few words of Tennyson sound better in a drawing-room than a description of the gulch.

"Stop a moment though," he said, hesitating; "I have just an hour, and it will take twenty minutes to get to my old place in the wood, twenty minutes to get back; that only leaves twenty minutes for Tennyson. I'll go down the Wilderness, sit on a stump, and read and listen to the falling water."

"Hullo, student!" cried Sir Robert, merrily waving the great mouth-piece of his hookah. "Want a cigar?"

"No, sir, not this morning," replied Range; and he strolled slowly on till he reached the soft velvet path, and then, finding his place, he began to read deliberately—committing choice passages to memory.

He walked very slowly, sometimes stopping for a minute or two, and seeming to be guided by some other sense than vision as he followed the zig-zags and curves of the half-wild place.

He had been reading thus for some ten minutes, when, raising his eyes as he turned a corner where an old stump had been turned into a rustic flower-vase, he stopped short, astounded at seeing Carleigh holding one of Lady Fanshaw's hands, and speaking passionately in a low whisper.

It was all momentary; Range's stop, Lady Fanshaw's hasty withdrawing of her hand, and the involuntary stamp given by Carleigh.

Had Arthur Range been a man accustomed to good society he would not have stopped, but would have slowly gone on reading, after just raising his hat; but being a natural man, unversed in etiquette, he stopped awkwardly.

Lady Fanshaw could not conceal the colour, half shame, half anger; but she recovered herself directly, and smiled at Range as she passed him.

"Don't go away too far, Mr. Range," she said; "and don't get so deep in your book that you forget our little match."

She swept on, leaving Carleigh and Range face to face.

"Well?" said the former, after an awkward pause.

"Well?" replied Range.

There was another awkward pause, and then Carleigh gave proof that, however dashing a soldier he might be, he was no diplomat. His course was certainly to ignore the scene which the other had witnessed; but, instead of doing this, he allowed the resentment that had been growing in his heart ever since the visitor's arrival to bubble over.

He had neglected Judith, and Range had been attentive. High treason this against himself. For how dared this low-born Yankee fix himself there, and devote himself to a lady to whom it was probable he would be married?

It was monstrous, and his impertinence in coming now and surprising him with Lady Fanshaw was worse.

"What did Sir Harry bring him here for? Was it as a kind of

"Yankee watch-dog?" he muttered. Then, unable to contain himself, he said in a cool, cutting manner—

"Are you going to stay here long, Mr. Range?"

Range looked hard at him for a moment, and then said to himself—"He wants to quarrel with me; he's so coldly polite. Well, I can't fight him that way. I must do it my own," so he answered shortly—

"Don't know. Are you?"

"Don't know! Yes. This is my home, sir. I thought perhaps your mines and factories might be needing your attention."

"No, they're all right," said Range. "I thought perhaps you'd have to join your regiment."

"Oh!" said Carleigh, and the two young men walked slowly on together.

"I should like to horsewhip the boor," Carleigh said to himself, with the anger and jealousy that were mingled in his breast overpowering him; while, on his side, Range was growing more calculating and cool.

"Be bad form to quarrel with him in Sir Harry's place; but I shouldn't dislike it," and he thought of Judith, and the possibility of her becoming this man's wife.

If he had not felt himself the young girl's slave before, this feeling that she would belong to Carleigh, whom he believed unworthy of her, was quite sufficient to stir his heart.

So the pair walked on together, down towards the rustic bridge, as a couple of strange dogs will sometimes go down a road, growling occasionally, and heating themselves for the sudden outburst that ends in yells and rending with teeth.

Carleigh was smiling and lighting a cigar, offering his case at the same time to Range.

"Thanks, yes. I'll have one," said the latter; and he followed Carleigh's example.

"You're making a longish stay," said the latter, at last.

"Yes," said Range, "I am. Sir Harry's very hospitable."

"Very," said Carleigh, who, in this game of chess, in which he felt that he held a very bad position, kept making false moves.

"You see, it's an advantage to me," said Range, "to be in the society of gentlemen. I want polish, and I pick it up from rubbing shoulders with such men as you."

Carleigh felt the sting, and his eyes contracted a little, and his teeth closed firmly, as he said, sharply, making his worst move just as Burton crossed the bridge and touched his hat—

"By the way, Mr. Range, you'll excuse me?"

"Oh, certainly! Go on! What is it?"

"I shouldn't mention it, but you said to me the other day how deficient you felt yourself to be in etiquette. I was only going to observe that it would be rather a mistaken proceeding for you to mention to Sir Harry that I was begging Lady Fanshaw to plead

my cause a little more strongly with Sir Robert respecting Miss Nesbitt."

Carleigh felt the next moment as if he would have liked to bite out his tongue for making such a slip.

"Oh, no! I know better than that," said Range, quietly; "but, by the way, I'm not a deeply read man; I only run through some of your English literature when I get a chance. Aren't you quoting from Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, you know, where Joseph says something like that to Lady Teazle about Maria?"

"Sir!"

"Oh, don't be offended," said Range quietly. "I'm rather rough, you see. Perhaps I ought not to have said that."

Carleigh did not speak again for a few minutes, but kept on biting more from one end of his cigar than he smoked off the other.

"Look here, Mr. Range," he said, stopping short, "we may as well understand each other."

"Very good," said Range, coolly.

"I'm a soldier and a man of few words, accustomed to campaigning, and I never trifle with any one."

"Same here, Captain. I've had some rough life too—campaigning, if you like to call it so."

"Let us understand one another, then, at once."

"Good. Go on!"

"You know, I suppose, that I am engaged to Miss Nesbitt?"

"No," said Range, quickly; "I didn't quite know it."

"Then you know it now, sir. I am."

"I shouldn't have thought it."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"What I say—I shouldn't have thought it."

Carleigh bit his lip.

"I think it as well to tell you this, because I have observed a tendency on your part to——"

"I say, hold hard a minute," said Range; "is it the proper thing to do—to discuss a question like this about a lady—out here in the open?"

"In a case like this, sir, it is," said Carleigh, furiously; "and once for all——"

"Hold hard there again; I mean stop, Captain Carleigh," said Range, speaking now with dignity. "Of course, I understand what you mean; but look here. You are a guest here in this house, just the same as I am, and if my behaviour is incorrect it is our host who will have to call me to order."

"As I stand, sir—as that lady's future husband——"

"I'm not talking to you as that lady's future husband. I'm not going to discuss that lady's position at all. I do know that it would be out of place. Sir Harry invited me here as a friend, and as the friend of his brother; and I shall try, Captain Carleigh, to respond to his kindness by behaving towards every one here as much

like a gentleman as I can. Now, then, I think you and I had better part. You don't like me."

Carleigh gave vent to an angry ejaculation.

"I can't help that. You want to get rid of me. Well, perhaps it would be pleasanter for both parties if you were in Asia and I were in America. But we're together, and we must make the best of it: for I'm not going away till what I consider is the proper time."

Carleigh took a step towards him with his fist clenched; but Range did not shrink—he only smiled.

"Don't do that," he said quietly. "This is the old country where officers and gentlemen have given up all that sort of thing. It belongs to the past here. We do it in America, I'm sorry to say, and the fellows flash out their revolvers on the slightest provocation."

"Men have lost their lives though, here in England, for slighter provocation than you have given me."

"Yes," said Range, quietly, and with a hard, grey look coming into his face; "and men have been called out and shot, Captain Carleigh, for smaller acts than some of yours."

"What do you mean, scoundrel?"

"Don't call names, young man," said Range coldly. "That's bad form. You know what I mean. I didn't intend to say it, but you've been stirring me up till you roused me. Now, you've been speaking plainly, I'm going to speak plainly too. You want me to go. I'm not going. You want to know whether I'm going to mention to Sir Harry that I saw you begging a lady to intercede for you. It isn't likely. I want to act as a gentleman should while I'm here. I can't buy birth, and if I could I wouldn't. I think I know how man should behave to man, and if your college education and code of etiquette don't teach it to you any better than you seem to have learned it, I'm very glad I never had your advantages."

"Will you fight?" said Carleigh, in a low voice.

"No!"

"Then I'll strike you, and call you the coward you are."

"Don't do that," said Range, quietly; "for, if you do, I'll half kill you. There, stop this. You and I are forgetting ourselves, Captain. Your cigar's out. Let me give you one of mine."

He offered his case, and Carleigh stood glaring at him.

"Take one, Captain, and smoke it. This is the nineteenth century, and this is Old England, where people are free. You and I clash one with the other, but there's no help for it. You must put up with me while I'm here: I've got to put up with you. Light? That's right. Now, suppose we smoke our cigars as if nothing had passed, and then go and play our game of croquet with the ladies. It's a pity this has happened, but it did not begin with me."

Carleigh took the cigar and the light, mechanically following Range's example, and beginning to smoke. While he took the rustic-chair, Range seated himself on the low rail of the wooden bridge, with the deep pool of clear water beneath, into which the streamlet rushed

gurgling, bringing food to the trout below upon the watch; and, as the two men sat and smoked, Range thought deeply of his position, and with his thoughts there was mingled a feeling of pity, grief, and vexation that he had seen so much.

He asked himself what he ought to do, and then concluded that he could do nothing—though hoping that the morning's incident would perhaps have a good effect.

Carleigh was thinking of his own position, and the ugly creases came into his forehead as he thought how easily a man might fall backwards over the rail of a bridge like that and be drowned.

Neither spoke, and they were in the same positions when there was a rustle of dresses, and Lady Fanshaw and Judith came down the green path.

"Ah, there you are!" cried Judith. "Come, George, let's have our match. We are to be partners."

Carleigh was a weak man, and he could not help darting a look of triumph at Range, who took it unmoved, and then turned to Lady Fanshaw.

"We must beat them," he said, smiling in his quiet, grave fashion.

Lady Fanshaw's face was slightly flushed as she met his eyes fixed upon her in this frank, honest way, and as he seemed to read on he said to himself—

"If I were one of the clever diplomatic people, I might tell her a fable as we played; something about thin ice, or playing with poisonous snakes; but I'm not clever. I wish I were, for the little woman's good and only weak. I'll give her a hint while we're at play."

The game went on for some time before Arthur Range had his opportunity, and then, as they were standing together, while Carleigh was helping Judith through several hoops, he looked at Lady Fanshaw, and their eyes met.

"I can read what you are saying to me," he said to himself. "You're asking me as a gentleman to forget all I saw this morning. Now try if you can read this."

He looked at her fixedly, and his eyes were grave and earnest, and his glance firm and kindly withal.

Then there was a click of the balls, and Judith called to Range to take his turn.

Lady Fanshaw had read his glance correctly, and for the rest of that day she was cold and grave.

That night she was upon her knees for a long time, and the prayer that rose from her heart was for strength.

CHAPTER XIV.

RANGE IS SNUBBED.

"GOING, Mr. Range?" said Judith, starting and colouring slightly, but only to resume her composed manner—"so soon?"

"Soon!" he said, with a laugh. "Do you know I've been here five weeks?"

"No; I did not pay any heed to the time, and I'm sure Uncle Harry did not."

"Well, it's very kind of him; but I must be getting on."

He thrust a book into his pocket, one that he had been reading aloud in the woods, from which he was returning when he had met Judith busy with basket and scissors in the flower-garden, cutting a great heap of bright blossoms for indoor decoration.

Judith looked at him rather wistfully, in a curious, half-puzzled way, and found that he was following her example.

"Where do you go next?" she asked, hastily.

"I don't know," he replied, rather sadly. "I have no particular aim. I must just tour around and see a little more English life. I like English life."

"I am very glad," said Judith. "It is a compliment from a foreigner."

"Oh, don't call me a foreigner," he cried, hastily. "I'm of English descent, and I speak English—with an accent," he added laughingly.

"Well, I suppose I ought not to call you foreign," said Judith, composedly.

"No; only an ignorant branch of the English nation, eh?"

"Ignorant? No, I don't think you ignorant. There are many points in our manners that you miss."

"And in grammar," he said, bitterly.

"You might speak more grammatically correct; but your conversation is on a level with that of most people I meet. You forget, Mr. Range, that you know thousands of things we do not, even if you are not a society man."

"Ah, well!" he said, "that I shall never be. I had better go back to my savage home," he continued, with a laugh.

"I am sorry when you talk of going."

"Say that again," cried Range, eagerly.

"That I am sorry you are going?" said Judith, calmly. "Well, yes; I am sorry. It is not pleasant to part from the friends one has made, either out in the East or here at home."

"And—and," he said, quickly, "am I to consider that you look upon me as a friend?"

"Why, of course," said Judith, smiling, and looking naïvely in his face; "we have known you so long."

"You make me very happy by saying that," he cried, eagerly—"more happy than I dare tell you."

"Happy? Why?"

"Because I feel such a common sort of a man beside you, and so——"

"Ready to disparage yourself," said Judith; "you should not do that. But there, I must go; I'm busy."

"No; don't go yet," he exclaimed, quickly. "I want to talk to you. I've a great deal to say."

"Well, go on," she said, composedly, "and I'll cut flowers."

Judith's words were composed, but her cheeks looked of a deeper tint than usual, though, perhaps, that was from the colour reflected from the blossoms—scarlet geraniums are rather red.

Range remained silent, and his brow wrinkled.

"Well," said Judith, looking up in a half-amused fashion, "I thought you wanted to say a great deal to me?"

He looked at her in a pained way, and shook his head.

"No," he said, sadly. "It was all a dream."

"A dream?"

"Yes; I wanted to tell you what I have been dreaming."

"Ah!" said Judith, in a disappointed tone, "I am not good at dreams."

Just then, as they raised their eyes, they became conscious of two groups in different parts of the extensive grounds, visible to them, but widely divided, and each unconscious of the other's presence.

On their right were the two elderly brothers, seated beneath one of the spreading trees in quiet converse, fighting their battles over again, maybe, in the calm retirement of the beautiful old home. Their swords were rusting in their sheaths, their work was done, and a pleasant air of content irradiated their handsome elderly features.

On the other hand, far down among the bosky evergreen, Arthur Range and Judith could see Lady Fanshaw and Carleigh. She was in a light morning costume, carrying a white parasol, with which she seemed to be touching some flower from time to time, while Carleigh was talking to her earnestly, with a book in his hand, to which, however, he never referred.

"Well," said Judith, hastily, "about your dream, Mr. Range?"

"My dream!" he exclaimed, as if brought back from thinking something else. "No; why should I tell you? It was only a dream. I am little better than a savage from the Far West, and——"

"Mr. Range!"

"There, I don't understand the ways of English ladies."

As he spoke, Judith saw that he was looking hard at her cousin, and the colour mounted now painfully to her cheeks and temples as she gazed indignantly in his eyes, reading his inmost thoughts the more easily that they were hers.

But there was a sting in his words that she could not forgive. He had been looking hard at Lady Fanshaw after a glance at her

calm, elderly husband, and evidently he had said to himself—"Ought a married lady, situated as she is, to be openly countenancing the attentions of Captain Carleigh?"

Then his words—

"There, I don't understand the ways of English ladies."

It was two-edged, accusing both Lady Fanshaw and herself of coquetry, and trifling with the feelings of others.

Arthur Range did not know how deeply his words cut, nor how much poison they left in the wound; for during some days past Judith had been trying to nerve herself to a difficult task—that of speaking to Alice regarding her conduct with Carleigh. It was innocent enough on her part, but shocked the senses of a girl fresh from a retired Eastern life. Besides, George Carleigh was soon to be her betrothed, so Alice Fanshaw said in many a confidential chat, which always, however, trailed off into a cool silence that was irksome to both.

"I'll speak to her," Judith had said to herself. "No, I cannot; she would rebuke me and say it was jealousy, and I could not bear for her to say that." And so the matter had stood, Judith's heart bleeding as she seemed to see the shadow of coming trouble in her cousin's frivolity, and pain for the noble, trusting uncle whom she dearly loved.

Judith's face, then, flamed as she gazed indignantly in Range's eyes, and he felt ready to throw himself at her feet and beg for pardon.

"Pray forgive me," he said, earnestly, "Miss Nesbitt—Judith. Have some pity on me. It is my blunt way. You know what I am. Heaven knows that I would not willingly say a word that should offend you. It was a slip."

"A slip!" she said, scornfully. "Oh, Mr. Range, it was—it was—oh!" she cried, with a stamp of her little foot, "you were right. It is quite time that you should go."

One moment there was a glimpse of Judith's indignant face, with its flashing eyes, then she was gone, flowers and all.

Arthur Range stood motionless for a few minutes, with his breast swelling with rage, misery, and disappointment.

"She's right," he said to himself; "it is time I went away. I oughtn't to have come. I did have a sort of prophetic warning in the 'Grand' that morning that I should only make myself miserable by coming, and I have."

"What a savage I am! The sooner I'm back with Uncle Wash the better. I'm no more fit for the society of English ladies than a bear. What's the good of money? A girl like that thinks nothing of it. Nor yet of me. Well, I suppose it's my nature. She read what I meant as if it had been printed, and—well, it was a bit of honest indignation on my part. I don't care," he continued, throwing himself into a seat; "it's disgraceful, and Judith oughtn't to marry such a scoundrel—cad, I suppose they'd call him here. I

don't think the other means any harm, poor woman; but she's walking on the brink of a precipice and doesn't know it. She's always with that blackguard; and if ever man tried to tempt woman to do wrong, I believe from my soul Carleigh's tempting her; while Sir Harry, gentle, chivalrous old soldier—by George! I quite love the old fellow!—he sees nothing, hears nothing, in his simple faith, and worship of the beautiful woman he has made his wife.

"Oh! a mistake—a mistake," he said, after a pause. "May and October. Poor old fellow, if she does go wrong it will kill him!

"Am I wrongfully suspicious?" he went on. "Is it only the free way of English women? No; I'm right, or Judith would not have flamed up as she did. It was more than indignation about herself. One can see it all. Some day the poor old fellow will wake up and find himself alone. He's just the sort of man who would blow his brains out in despair," he continued, watching the brothers where they sat.

"No; he's a soldier, one of those gentle, chivalrous old trusting fellows; but, if his faith were broken, he'd be another man—the man who has led his men into battle. I believe he'd kill that blackguard like a dog, and—serve him right.

"Shall I put him on his guard, poor fellow? How handsome he looks, with his great, drooping, grey moustache—gentleman to the backbone. They may sneer at breed, but there's breed there; so there is in his bluff old brother. By George! what a pair! I don't wonder that English soldiers carry all before them. I'd follow either of those men to the death.

"Heigho! It's a queer world! Well, what shall I do? Tell him to look out? Give his brother a hint?

"I should deserve horsewhipping if I did, and I should get it. After all, it is only my mean, beggarly, contemptible education that makes me think such things of a pure-minded English lady. I'm in the wrong; she's right enough. Some day that scoundrel will go too far, get ordered out of the house, and all will be well. She's too sweet a woman and too clever not to see her danger soon.

"My course is marked out; I've been dreaming, and I've woke up. I've ended by disgracing myself with Judith; but she will say nothing. I must not make matters worse by doing so dastardly a thing as speaking to the General—either General.

"Perhaps all this is a lesson for me in the manners of polite society; and I shall get on better by-and-by. Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed, bitterly, "the idea of my aspiring to that sweet English lady; but the thought of her being betrothed to that fellow seemed to stir me. No; don't be a humbug, Arthur; you know you took a fancy when at Malappore, and it was that made you take this European trip with a faint sort of idea that perhaps—perhaps—perhaps—

"There, the bubble's burst. I'll write her a line, and beg her pardon. No, I won't. She'll think better of me for asking it openly,

and in a frank, manly way, and I will directly after dinner—if I get a chance.”

He started, for, unheard, the brothers had approached over the soft grass.

“Hallo, traveller!” said Sir Robert, heartily.

“All alone, Range?” said Sir Harry.

“Thought I saw Judith with you,” said Sir Robert; and the brothers seated themselves by the visitor.

“Yes, she was gathering flowers,” said Range, “and has gone in.”

“Well, are you ready for the birds, Range?” said Sir Harry. “Burton tells me the coveys are splendid this year.”

“Ready? No, Sir Harry. I have made up my mind to go to-morrow.”

“Go? To-morrow? My dear boy, don’t think of such a thing. I’m reckoning on some good tramps over the stubble with you.”

“The jade! she has snubbed him,” thought Sir Robert. “What imp girls are!” Then aloud, “You’re not going, Range?”

“Yes, Sir Robert, yes. Do you know I’ve been here going on for six weeks?”

“No,” said Sir Robert, “and I’m sure my brother doesn’t. All we know is that we have for a visitor a nice, frank young fellow from the West, and that we’ve both been delighted with his society.”

“Indeed yes,” said Sir Harry, “and I shall be terribly disappointed if you don’t stay. Here, I must set Lady Fanshaw at him, Bob. He can’t refuse her.”

“No,” said Sir Robert, whose face turned a little gloomy just then. “You’ll have to stay, Range.”

“He doesn’t say he’ll set his niece at me,” thought Range, and in a quiet, firm tone he persisted in his determination, and so the matter ended by Range going up to the house.

“Judy has been snubbing him, Harry,” said Sir Robert.

“Snubbing him?”

“Yes. I’ll be bound to say he has been proposing to her and she has snubbed him.”

“Surely Mr. Range, knowing as he does that George is to marry her, would not overstep his position? He is not polished, but I don’t think he would forget himself like that.”

“Oh, I don’t know, Harry; a fellow in love says and does strange things.”

“I don’t think Mr. Range would so far forget his position as my guest.”

“I do, and I hope he has.”

“My dear Bob,” said Sir Harry, laying his hand upon his brother’s knee, “this is a craze of yours.”

“Very likely.”

“You don’t much care for George Carleigh?”

“Not at all.”

“I’m sorry, Bob, because he tells me that matters are quietly

progressing between him and Judith, and I sincerely hope that he and my darling little niece will soon be man and wife."

"My darling little niece, Harry; and I'm dead against you there."

"And it's no use for either of us to worry, my dear boy, for the young people will settle it all themselves."

"Egad! they will, Harry; and so I'll hold my tongue."

"Ah! there is Alice, and George is with her," said Sir Harry, rising. "I'll go and join them."

"And I shall stop here. I've just a threatening of gout in my right toe, Harry, and I shall rest it for a bit," said Sir Robert, whose countenance became overcast.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST TIME OF ASKING.

SIR HARRY rose and strolled off to join Lady Fanshaw, and Sir Robert sat frowning and looking after him, till all at once he became aware of a shadow at his feet, and there was Judith looking rather white.

"Oh, you're there, are you?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, uncle."

"Come closer, Judy," said the old man, sternly. "I want to talk to you."

Judith sat down close to him, and he took hold of her arm, remaining silent for some few minutes.

"Judy," he said at last, "you're a woman grown."

"Yes, uncle."

"And I'm a blunt old man of the world."

"Yes, uncle."

"I'm going to speak very plainly to you. I don't want to make mischief, mind that."

"I'm sure you don't, uncle."

"Then look here, my darling, I'm in a hobble."

"A hobble, uncle?"

"Yes, my dear. I don't like the way things are going here."

The colour began to come in Judith's cheeks.

"Tell me this frankly, without any missy fine airs, are you going to marry George Carleigh?"

"No, uncle, never!"

"Well, that's emphatic," said the old man with a sigh of relief. "I'm sorry for your uncle's sake, because he's set on it; I'm glad for mine, for I'm not. But look here, he's paying all sorts of attentions to your cousin to pique you, and I don't like to see it—not manly and nice, and some day it will be giving Uncle Harry a twinge worse than the gout. What's to be done?"

"Oh, uncle, I don't know."

"I can't tell Harry. I can't speak to Alice of course. I won't

“speak about it to George Carleigh; I won’t let him see that I notice it, but it must be stopped.”

Judith looked at her uncle in a troubled way.

“You must speak either to Alice or George Carleigh, or—there, no, I won’t swear before you, my dear, it isn’t nice and manly, but it has given me the gout horribly. It has upset me, and it flies to my toe. You’ve—you’ve noticed this?”

“Don’t, please don’t ask me, dear.”

“But I have asked you, girl. What’s to be done?”

“I—I don’t know, dear.”

“Hang the puppy! I wish Harry didn’t believe in him so. Dear old boy! he’s like a child over such matters. You must speak to Alice.”

“Uncle, it would break up our friendship for ever.”

“Then you must speak to George Carleigh.”

“My dear uncle, it is impossible.”

“Then what is to be done?” he cried in a perplexed way. “There, there, I suppose we must wait and let the enemy develop his tactics a little more before we shape our own.”

“Yes, uncle,” replied Judith with a sigh of relief, and she half rose.

“No, no,” said the old gentleman, “I have not done with you yet. Sit down.”

Judith resumed her place.

“Now once more, you won’t have George Carleigh? This is the last time of asking.”

“No, uncle, I—will—not.”

“Then what’s this about you and Range?”

“Uncle!”

“You two have been quarrelling, you’ve snubbed him, you jade!”

“I—I don’t know what you mean, uncle.”

“Yes, you do, pussy; I know as well as can be. Poor fellow! he’s been saying something, and you’ve thought it premature and snubbed him. You did, didn’t you?”

“Yes, uncle,” said Judith consciously.

“Ah, well! don’t be hard on him. Never mind his money, he’s none the worse for being rich. What I think most of is that he’s a thoroughly nice fellow. Don’t let him go, Judy.”

“Not let him go, uncle?”

“No; he’s down in the dumps, and he has told us he’ll go to-morrow, and, by Jove! he means it too.”

“Ah!”

Judith sank back against the seat with her face white, and her lower lip dropped just a little, as if to show how prettily red it was, while the old man chuckled softly.

“Ha! ha! ha! ha! Call me a conceited old fool if you like, Harry, but if I don’t understand women better than you do, I’m a Dutchman. There, run away now, my dear. I’ve given you plenty of mental food for one morning, go and let it digest.”

Judith turned her eyes, full of tears, upon her uncle, and the old

man caught her to his breast, held her there with the sobs struggling for exit, and then released her, saying hastily,

"Get away with you, pussy! We mustn't have a scene out here. I say, Judy," he cried, holding her hand as she was going, "that was the last time of asking, you know."

"Yes—yes—yes," she cried, nodding through her tears; "the very, very, very last time of asking, uncle, and I don't want to marry anybody at all."

"What wicked little storytellers girls are," said the old general, laughing softly; "and the best of the fun is they think all the while that they are speaking nothing but the truth."

He sat leaning forward and watching the pretty figure going up to the ivy-grown, old stone mansion, now in the shade, now in the brilliant sunshine, and there was a pleasant smile upon his face for awhile.

Then it grew more sober, and he sighed as he thought of what his life might have been if some such sweet woman as the one he watched had shed the sunshine of her smiles upon him.

"Ah!" he said softly, "I dare say I should have been quite another man."

Just then Judith disappeared, and he saw his brother going round the end of the house, while George Carleigh was talking rather markedly to Lady Fanshaw, who was about to enter the drawing-room window.

The pleasant look upon Sir Robert's countenance gave place to a stern frown, and he drew himself up with something of his old military air as he muttered—

"Something must be done."

CHAPTER XVI.

A CONFESSION OF SOUL.

THE remainder of that day passed in a somewhat constrained manner. Every member of the family at Elinthorpe seemed to be troubled with a desire for solitude till they were united at dinner; and even that sociable meal passed off in a curiously stiff fashion.

After coffee, the two younger men strolled out into the grounds, to find that the night had turned gloomy, as if a storm were threatening. The air was thick and heavy, dense clouds veiling the sky; but the scent of the flowers came soft and sweet, and, as Range walked slowly towards the drawing-room window, Carleigh, who was singularly silent, hanging behind and lighting a cigar, his heart gave a throb as he saw Judith's white dress where she stood leaning against the open glass casement.

"I can't go away without asking her to forgive me," he said. "It's my last night here, and I shall always remember these happy days when I am far away."

"Pish! how sentimental I am. Here, I'll go and speak to her like a man—right to the point."

He hesitated for a moment, and then Carleigh passed him, smoking, and went up to the other window, where Range supposed Lady Fanshaw to be, though, the lamps not being lit, he could not see her.

"I'm sorry it is so lovely a night," said Range, quietly, as he stopped in front of Judith.

"Why?"

"Because it will make my departure more difficult. This place is so beautiful. I have passed such happy days here."

Judith did not speak.

"Can Lady Fanshaw hear what I say?"

"No," said Judith, huskily, "I think not, and she is talking to Captain Carleigh now."

"Did you expect me to come and speak to you to-night?"

"Yes."

"Will you come with me round the grounds?"

"No. You can speak to me here."

Range remained silent now for a few minutes, during which they could hear the low murmur of Carleigh's deep voice on the one side, and from the other, where the light streamed out, an occasional laugh and the clink of a coffee-cup.

"I wanted to ask you to forgive me," said Range, at last.

"Forgive you?"

"For all I said to-day. I was much to blame. I grew excited, for I was bitter and disappointed. I had no right to be."

"No."

"But I felt it just as keenly."

"And you are really going to-morrow?"

"Yes. I would rather go. I have been here a long time. It will be better so."

To Range's astonishment and delight, Judith just then placed her hand upon his arm.

"Let us go down the garden," she said, softly, and his heart gave a great throb.

The next moment it was as heavy as lead, for he saw before them the figures of Carleigh and Lady Fanshaw, and he felt that he was to go and play police.

If that had been Judith's intention it proved to be a failure, for in a few minutes the other couple were invisible, and Judith was too intent upon her companion's words to think more of her cousin.

They had strolled nearly down to the Wilderness when Range stopped short, loosed her arm, and remained for a few moments watching the flitting here and there of a white moth, and a bright spark of a glow-worm in one of the banks.

"Different to the fireflies at Malaypore," he said,

"Yes"

It was quite a whisper, and there was another silence, then Range drew a long breath.

"Miss Nesbitt," he said, "I meant to have said to you to-night, in a plain, manly way, 'Forgive me, and good-bye'; but there's something that seems to make me say more to you—who told me to-day I was your friend. I want to say to you that I hope you will be very happy when you are married to Captain Carleigh."

It was a clumsy speech, awkwardly spoken, but it made Judith's heart bound.

"I shall never marry Captain Carleigh," she said at last.

"Then I will—I must tell you," he said, in a low, eager whisper; "I cannot keep it back. Miss Nesbitt—Judith—I love you—I do, as truly as a man could love you. I know all my faults, how unworthy I am, but, if you'll give me some hope, I'll try so hard to make myself more refined—a man at whom your friends would never sneer. Ah! you don't believe me," he said, bitterly. "You have no faith in me."

"Yes, I have," she said, quietly; "but this is all a mistake. You are so rich that hundreds of brilliant matches will be open to you. You are a mate for a princess."

"Rich? Why, you'd not refuse me because I am so rich?" he said. "Take away my money, and what am I? You don't refuse me for that?"

"I do," said Judith, firmly.

"Then I'll make myself poor for your sake," he cried.

"Why, what would your rich relatives say?"

"That I had again shown them that I was the luckiest fellow under the sun, and the cleverest."

"Cleverest!"

"In winning the love of a sweet, pure, English lady."

His words were so earnest and manly that Judith felt touched.

"I'm not much," he said. "I know the best point in me is my love for you."

"Oh, nonsense!" she said, laughing. "Mr. Range, why, you will see hundreds of ladies in your travels."

"So I have," he said, seriously: "German, French, Italian, Swiss—I've seen them all, and I have never felt to care to give one thought to them. Do you know why?"

"No. How should I?"

"I had seen you, and though I tried very hard to forget you——"

"Ah! but that was not polite," said Judith, with a forced laugh to conceal her trouble, but which laugh he took to be real.

"No," he said, bitterly. "It was not polite; but it was a weak, ignorant man's way of trying to get over a trouble. I might have known. I did know, but it was no use. I did struggle against it, and it's all over now."

He held out his hand, but Judith did not seem to see it.

"You have forgiven me for what I said to-day?"

"Yes, Mr. Range."

"Thank you," he said, quietly, and with a gentle appeal in his tone that was almost pathetic. "Now please try and forget all this, and in the kindness of your sweet, girlish nature don't be hard upon me. Don't ridicule the rough young Yankee fellow who was very rich, and was weak enough to think he might win an English lady's heart."

The moth kept fluttering round and round the glow-worm's light as if it were a candle, and the silence was almost intense as the sweet breath of the honeysuckle floated towards them; while Judith's tears, unseen by her companion, fell fast, and her heart kept on beating: "Yes—no—yes—no—yes—no," in answer to the question she kept asking.

Poor Arthur Range! he was ignorant indeed; too ready to disparage himself, or he would perhaps have fared differently.

Had he boldly clasped Judith there in his arms for the moment she would have resented it, then yielded to the insensible force that would have dominated her will, and Range would have walked back to the house with her a happy man.

As it was, he suddenly took a step towards her, caught her hand in his, and kissed it.

"God bless you!" he cried, hoarsely. "I shall not see you again alone. Good-bye!"

He had turned and hurried back to the house, as Judith thought, but only stepped in amongst the bushes and stood watching till he saw the soft white robe cross the threshold of the now lit-up drawing-room window. Then he turned and walked hurriedly away in among the trees, to seek the darkest part of the grounds, where he might try in the silent shadows to regain his equanimity, before going up to the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BEGINNING OF EVIL.

"COME out; I want to speak to you," said Carleigh, in a low tone, as he went up to the open drawing-room window.

"To speak to me?" said Lady Fanshaw, rather huskily, and, as if forced by his stronger will, she stepped out on to the dewy lawn and walked with him slowly towards the shrubbery.

As they came opposite to the open dining-room window, Alice paused and stood gazing in at the two silver-haired brothers; and her eyes rested upon the elderly handsome face of her husband till Carleigh touched her on the arm.

"Come," he said, softly; and she walked silently by his side.

She was conscious of a feeling that she should not do this thing, that it would be better to return at once to the house, but a strong emotion moved her to obey; and, before she was aware of it, the

little rustic gate had clicked, and they were down in the Wilderness, where the waters plashed and trickled musically, and from out of the darkest part there came a low, fluttering noise as the night-jar uttered its strange vibrating croak.

The moths were many, circling about and hawking here and there; glow-worms could be seen in several of the banks, and a soft diffusion of light that was almost darkness came from above amongst the trees.

"Why have you come down here?" she said at last. "It is getting late. Let us go back to the house."

"Because I am miserable," he whispered.

"What nonsense, George! There, you are mad and foolish. Come, be sensible. You are neglecting Judith for me."

"Judith! would you like me to be always hanging after that weak, white-haired child?"

She made no reply.

"I read your answer in your silence," said Carleigh, softly. "Alice, Alice, why could you not wait?"

"How absurd!" she cried. "Why, there was nothing between us. And now I forbid this subject for ever. Come, let us go back."

"No," he said, in a deep voice. "Stay here, I have much to say."

"You can as well speak up there," she replied, lightly. "Come, I am going back."

"You are going to stay," he cried, hoarsely; and, leading her quickly to the great rustic seat, he half pressed her down, and took his place by her side.

"George!" she exclaimed, and there was indignation in her tones as she felt how imprudent she had been.

"Hush!" he said, hoarsely. "I must speak now."

"Speak? George Carleigh, what do you mean?"

There was the indignant tone increasing in her voice, but he did not heed it then; and as she started up he caught both her hands in his.

"Alice," he whispered, "you must hear me now. All our past bids me speak. I cannot bear it longer. My love! my love!"

She started from him as if she had been stung, and in those moments the reality of her position came in all its force. For weeks past there had been something pleasurable in receiving the tender, respectful homage of this young and handsome man. He had been her old companion, and in the past, before his departure with his regiment to the Cape, there had been plenty of laughing flirtation.

He had gone, however, and she had not given him another thought; neither had he a thought for her till he received the news of her wedding, when he had been piqued into the earnest attentions which had resulted in the present declaration.

The days had glided by, and, thoughtlessly enough, Alice Fanshaw had received the adulation of her old companion. A thousand attentions had been offered to her like so much incense, and it had seemed very sweet, though thought of infidelity had never crossed her mind. Still, she had gone drifting on farther and farther into danger almost

unconsciously, with no one to speak words of warning—words, however, that she would have resented as the cruellest of insult.

George Carleigh had set himself to win what he called revenge; and to this intent he had brought to bear tender words, gentle respect, all the chivalry that man should display towards woman.

Alice had found it very pleasant, and when a reproving thought made advance she had indignantly told herself that there was no harm in all this; but now, in one moment, the peril of her position was plain, and the folly of her previous conduct stared her in the face.

"Why do you repulse me like this?" he whispered. "Alice, my own love, what is the world to us—this hateful marriage, this long time of bitter ordeal?"

"Silence!" she panted. "Loose my hands. How dare you insult me with such words!"

"Insult!" he cried. "Is it an insult to tell the beautiful idol of my life that I love her?"

"George Carleigh, loose my hands. Another such word—and I lay your conduct before my husband!"

"Your husband!" he cried, angrily. "What will you tell him? That you led me on with your looks and words till I spoke like this? Oh, it is too late. Remember all the past—all you have been to me! How can you resist me so?"

"Are you mad?" she cried, struggling to free her hands.

"Yes," he said, hoarsely, "with love—the love you pretend to despise!"

"Am I to call for help?" she said, trying to be firm.

"For help?" he cried, mockingly; "help? Against me? Hush! you foolish, fluttering bird!"

"Carleigh—George—for your own sake—for my sake!"

"Yes, for our sakes," he whispered.

"For the sake of him who has been more than father to you!"

"Silence!" he cried; "it is too late. You are mine now, Alice love!"

"Love!" she cried, throwing him from her, in her horror and despair. "How dare you use such a word as this to me!"

"Because you are my love, my very own, and——"

"Hush! for Heaven's sake!—Look! There! We are watched!"

He had caught her tightly in his arms, and one moment she was fiercely struggling; the next she was motionless and inert, pointing with one hand to their right.

Carleigh loosed his hold, and, as she staggered back, to sink half fainting upon the seat, covering her face with her hands, and uttering a low, sobbing moan of shame and despair, he sprang towards a figure, dimly seen in the darkness, close at hand.

Half fainting, the darkness growing blacker, and the trees circling round her giddy brain, Alice Fanshaw sat back, as if in a long and hideous nightmare, listening, white with terror, till Carleigh seemed to start out of the darkness before her.

"Back!" he panted, "back to the house—quick! be calm!"

"What is it?" she said, as she rose, trembling, and then sank back helpless on the seat. "What have you done?"

"Silenced a blabbing tongue," he replied, in a hoarse whisper. "Saved your reputation and my own."

CHAPTER XVIII

"ON HORROR'S HEAD."

ALICE FANSHAW sank back in the rustic seat, staring blankly at Carleigh, who caught her hands in his once more and tried to raise her.

His hand was cold and wet, and his garments were dripping with water.

But it was not that which made her shrink from him with a feeling of loathing: it was the knowledge of her position; that her weakness and folly had led her to a precipice down which she dared not look. An hour ago, George Carleigh had been the pleasant cavalier of her existence, to whose going she had looked forward with pain as likely to form a blank in her life. Now, as she realised all, she shuddered, and his presence with her seemed an added horror.

"Do you hear what I say?" he whispered. "Alice, you must go back, and, for your life, be calm!"

She did not answer, for out of the mist and darkness that had seemed to swoop down upon her brain the incidents of the past few minutes came out one by one with terrible distinctness.

If she had fainted, the insensibility had been but momentary. Then she had sunk down upon her knees on the soft turf, staring wildly across the stream where Carleigh had disappeared.

And now he was back before her, shaking her by the arm.

"Are you asleep?" he said, roughly. "Alice, rouse yourself!"

"Yes," she said, speaking vacantly; and she rose and stood before him.

"You heard all?"

"Yes."

"Then listen. It is only six miles to Brackley. The mail goes through at three. We could easily walk the distance. Be in the conservatory at twelve."

She shook her head, shuddering.

"What has come to you?" he cried, fiercely. "Can you not see that this is a time for action? You will fly with me—this affair necessitates flight. You will be ready to go with me at twelve, away from this life of slavery, and in some far-off land we will forget everything—the world—all—in our love!"

"That man!" said Alice, in a hoarse voice; "he will tell my husband. I dare not face him again."

"But for a few hours," he whispered; "then flight, and the past shall be as a dream."

"Ah!" she cried, loudly. "I remember—I remember now. You—you have killed him!"

"Hush!" he cried, pressing her arm so firmly that she uttered a cry of pain; but the suffering cleared her vision more and more. "Be silent!"

"Tell me," she cried, fiercely, "will he tell my husband all—all that he has seen?"

"No."

"Then I am right. You—oh! horror! horror! horror! you have killed him!"

"Will you be silent?" he cried, savagely. "I have defended your reputation. Can you not see? He brought it upon himself. Look at me!"

She gazed at him wildly, and, gloomy as it was, she could see that he was drenched with water; his evening-dress was muddied, and his coat almost ripped from his shoulders.

"There is not a moment to lose," he said, savagely. "Go back to the drawing-room. Be calm—talk—play—do anything. You have not seen me lately. I left to smoke a cigar. At twelve, mind, in the conservatory."

"No! no!" she moaned. "I would sooner die!"

"Hush! you foolish woman," he cried, fiercely. "Will you be calm? Do you not see that this is a case of life or death, perhaps to both? There, I'll say no more about our flight. Go back! I insist! At once! There is a stronger tie between us now even than our love."

She shivered, and sank back into the seat, but recovered herself directly, and stood up.

"What am I to do?" she said, hoarsely.

"Go with me to-night."

"No; I have done enough evil," she said, softly. "I would sooner tell my husband all."

"And send me to my death?"

She shuddered.

"We must not stop talking here. There, you are calmer now. Go back to the house; I will not touch you. There is nothing to fear, only be calm. You will be silent?"

There was a momentary hesitation. Then, in a despairing tone, she said, "Yes."

"Go, then, at once. But you will meet me in the conservatory at twelve?"

"Never!" she said, in a low tone; and again she repeated her former words—"I would sooner die!"

She uttered a low, gasping wail then, and seemed to be making some tremendous effort over herself to master her nerves. Then, as Carleigh stood shivering with horror and his drenched garments, he saw the tall graceful figure glide slowly through the trees.

Then he threw himself upon the turf, and lay thinking what he should do.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE EDDY.

ALICE FANSHAW never knew how she went back to the house.

At times she realised that she had made some tremendous effort over herself, and had returned as in a dream; but the first distinct remembrance she had of that portion of the evening was of seeing the light from the dining-room, and stopping to gaze in, for the sight of her husband had seemed to bring her back to herself.

She paused by one of the trees, and stood gazing at him as he sat, calm and thoughtful, looking straight at her, but unaware of her presence, while her hands were slowly raised towards him, clasped by way of appeal.

Then, after a few minutes, and without heeding Sir Robert, who was sitting back asleep, with the snake of his long pipe in his hand and the tube in his lips, she walked slowly on towards the drawing-room window that she had left so calmly—when?—an hour—a year—a lifetime since? When was it?

She could not tell. All she knew was that Carleigh, who seemed now all-powerful over her mind, had bade her be silent and calm, and she would be calm. She must suffer, but it was life or death, and with wonderful self-control, still as if in a dream, she walked slowly up to the window, and there stopped short with a strange feeling of envy forcing itself into her troubled mind.

For there, looking in her eyes the very essence of all that was pure and innocent, sat Judith.

She had evidently been busy by the tea-table, and then, waiting, had listlessly thrown herself into a lounge, and was thinking, with rather a sad and weary look upon her face, which was lit by one of the shaded lamps.

She seemed to rouse herself suddenly, and, jumping up, walked to the window where Alice stood.

"Why, you've been playing spy, dear," she said. "How long have you been there?"

"Some time," was the reply, in a low, pained voice.

"Why, where is George?"

"I do not know, dear; he said he would have a cigar."

Judith looked up at her for a moment, and then, as if driving away an unpleasant thought, she said, quickly—

"The gentlemen seem to have forsaken us. Come in, dear. I must go and call uncle; he has had his nap by now."

Lady Fanshaw entered the room slowly, and, as she came within the influence of the lamp, Judith uttered an exclamation.

"Why, Alice, dear, how pale you are!"

"Pale? Am I? It is the heat. I think we are going to have a storm?"

"You look so ill, dear," said Judith, tenderly; and she spoke as

though she were moved by what had taken place with Range that night.

As she said this she placed one arm round her cousin and kissed her cheek, leading her the while to a chair.

Alice shuddered, and averted her eyes. She could not look at the gentle, innocent girl at her side.

"Why, you shivered!" exclaimed Judith. "There, you have been wandering about in the damp night-air and have taken cold. I know what to do—a good hot cup of tea. Uncle Robert says it is as good as quinine to keep off fever."

"Fever!" said Alice, with an effort.

"Yes. A cold is only a mild kind of fever. There, my lady—there's your medicine. Oh! Alice, dear, how absurd it seems. Any one would think I was mistress here, making the tea, and treating you like a guest. But you don't mind."

Alice took the tea, and hurriedly kissed her cousin's hand.

As she did so, Judith's smooth brow twitched, and a wrinkle or two puckered her pretty face; for a thought not at all conducive to George Carleigh's success as a wooer for her had entered her mind; but she said nothing, only returned the kiss, and then laid her cheek against her cousin's clammy brow.

"Alice, dear," she said, softly, "if you have any trouble at any time I want you to come to me. I want to confide in you as well."

"Yes, yes! Do. Pray do," said Lady Fanshaw, as if glad to hear her cousin speak. "Is—is there anything now?"

Judith did not answer for a few moments, and then said, softly—"Yes."

"What is it? Pray tell me, dear!"

She spoke excitedly at times, but seemed to drag herself back into a state of unnatural calm.

"It is about George Carleigh."

Alice's eyes half closed, but her temples throbbed, and there was a strange twitching about the corners of her lips.

"Uncle Harry seems to take it for granted that we are to be married some day. Do you think it would be for the best?"

"No, no!" said Alice, quickly, and her eyes gazed fully now into those of her questioner. "No, Judith! No! But," she cried, quickly, "do you love him?"

Judith looked at her curiously for a few moments, and then her lips parted to utter a decided—

"No!"

"Hallo, here, why weren't we called to tea?" cried Sir Robert, loudly. "Come along, Harry. Here's gossiping going on. Well, girls will be girls. Hallo! where are the boys?"

"Out somewhere, uncle," said Judith, pouring out more tea.

"You look pale, love," said Sir Harry, tenderly, bending down over Lady Fanshaw, and screening the act with his own body, as he softly

pressed back his wife's heavy hair. "Your forehead is quite damp. It is the heat, I suppose."

He smiled, and took a chair near her, while Judith passed tea to both, glancing at her cousin once, asking herself what had passed; while, by a superhuman effort, Alice sat there calm and composed, sipping her tea mechanically, and then taking up a piece of work.

It was a singular mental state, as if she had been utterly stunned by the events of the evening; and for the time being there was a cessation of the intense mental agony she had felt.

Judith did not take much notice of her; for her own thoughts were busy and full of repentance at her behaviour towards Range.

"I seemed so cold towards him," she thought; "but I could not say anything then. Oh, surely he will not go to-morrow! I wish he would come in now."

Judith felt as if she ought not to have permitted such a wish to enter her mind, and she coloured slightly with vexation.

"It's all nonsense!" she said to herself. "He's not gentlemanly; and as to his money, I hate it. How dare he fall in love with me!"

And then, with all the inconsistency of her sex, she glanced across the room, for there was a footstep, and she heaved a sigh of vexation as the door opened and the butler entered, bearing in some hot toast for Sir Robert.

"He's a Cræsus," she said. "Let him fall in love with some female Cræsus in America. I'm going to stop with dear old Uncle Rob."

She left her seat, and crossed to the old General to take his cup and have her ear pinched for her pains.

"Don't those fellows want any tea?" he said.

"Not they," said Sir Harry. "Boys don't care for tea. It is only ladies and old women of our kind, Bob, who sip the cup. I say, though, I wish they'd come. I want some music to-night."

Lady Fanshaw drew her breath painfully.

"Mr. Range is offended," said Judith, to herself. "Poor fellow! I am sorry."

Sir Harry rose and walked to the window.

"Don't see any peripatetic fireflies—no cigars burning," he said.

"Perhaps they are having a stroll."

By-and-by the butler came in again.

"Seen Captain Carleigh, Josephs?" said Sir Harry.

"No, Sir Harry. Not since dinner. I think he went down the garden."

"With Mr. Range, Josephs?" said Sir Robert.

"No, Sir Robert. Mr. Range went out too—lit a cigar, Sir Robert—and went down the green path to the woods."

Lady Fanshaw's face was now ghastly.

The butler left the room, and Sir Robert lay back in his chair, pretending to sip his tea, but all the time watching Judith.

"Poor girl!" he said to himself; "she's fidgeting because that fellow Range is not here. He's a fool, sir, that he is. I never was

a lady's man, but in my time do you think I'd have let such a girl as my Judy fret after me, and do you think I'd have talked about going farther on my travels when I could have made a lasting home in the heart of such a girl as that? Pshah! I'm deceived in the fellow! I'm deceived in him!—Here, give me some more tea, Judy, my dear," he said, aloud.

"Why, uncle, you've had four cups," she replied.

"Well, what's that to you, miss? It isn't your tea; it's your uncle's. I'm thinking, and it makes me thirsty. What say, Harry?"

"I'm going to look for George," said Sir Harry. "I feel like you, thirsty, Bob; but it's a thirst for sweet sounds. Alice, my dear, will you get out some music?"

Lady Fanshaw rose and walked slowly to the piano as Sir Harry left the room, and stood there cold-eyed and staring, with her back to Sir Robert and Judith.

"What next?" she asked herself. Dared she try and stop Sir Harry?

She felt the next moment that she could do nothing but let the vessel of her fate drift slowly on as this life-stream should carry it. There were the breakers right ahead, and beyond them the rocks of destruction.

She stood there so silent and motionless that Sir Robert turned to gaze at her, looking directly after at Judith; but, seeing that she too was watching her cousin, he hastily turned aside his gaze, and sat frowning and thinking in no very satisfied frame of mind.

"I've got it all clubbed," he said to himself, "but I can't interfere; and I don't like to talk to Judy about it. Well, well, perhaps matters will settle themselves."

Meanwhile, Sir Harry strolled into the library to find it empty, then through the great conservatory—a favourite place with Carleigh; but he was not there, and it did not seem likely that he would be in the billiard-room, for the lamps had not been lit.

"They're down the garden somewhere, I dare say, and I shall not go there."

He was just turning to go back when the faint scent of a cigar was wafted to him.

Some one was smoking in the billiard-room after all.

Crossing the conservatory, and opening the glass door, he stepped in.

The place was dark, for, though there was a glow in the east, the moon had not yet risen, and at the first glance the place seemed as empty as it was silent.

"You there, Range?" he said.

No answer.

"George, my boy!"

"Eh? Yes. Who's there?" exclaimed Carleigh, hurriedly, as if waking from sleep.

"Why, what are you doing here in the dark, boy?"

"Only having a cigar. It was quiet and cool here. I'm afraid I've been asleep."

"Not a doubt of it. Where's Range?"

The words were on Carleigh's lips, "Am I my brother's keeper?" but he did not speak them, saying quietly—

"Range? Hardly seen him since he left the table."

"Gone for a stroll then, I suppose. Long one, seemingly. Here, come in the drawing-room, Alice is waiting. We want some music."

Carleigh rose from the divan where he had been lying, and accompanied the General back to the drawing-room, where, looking deadly white, Lady Fanshaw was standing ready to shiver slightly as she saw them enter together, Sir Harry with his arm resting lightly on Carleigh's shoulder, and a smile on the latter's lips, as if there were no black secret waiting to be revealed, and all were as it had been weeks ago.

CHAPTER XX.

"HE COMETH NOT,' SHE SAID."

As Carleigh entered the room, Judith saw that his eyes seemed to contract, and that he also was very pale. He directed a quick glance at Alice before dropping his eyelids.

Judith noticed his pallid looks and the glance, and put her own interpretation upon all.

"They have had words—a quarrel, perhaps; and—oh! I am so glad."

Then her thoughts turned to her own trouble, and the sinking sensation she felt belied her words.

For some moments Lady Fanshaw could not look at Carleigh, but when he walked slowly and carelessly towards her she could not help glancing at him, and a feeling of wonder dazed her for the moment.

He was smiling as he came; and though he no longer wore a dress-coat, having changed it for a loose velvet jacket buttoned to the chin, his features were unruffled, and his black trousers and patent leather shoes were unsoiled.

Was it all a dream? she asked herself.

"What are we to sing?" he said. "Have you any orders, Sir Harry?"

"What you like, my dears, so long as it is soft and soothing. Hah!"

He gave vent to a sigh of content as he settled himself comfortably in his lounge.

"Will you come and play, Judith?" said Carleigh; and there was such a gentle tone in his voice and such a bright smile upon his lip as he addressed her that the girl's heart throbbed again.

"They have had words, and there will be no more of that wretched flirting. Oh, I am glad!"

Her thoughts stood still there, for she asked herself, Was she glad?

What did it mean? If George Carleigh had quarrelled with Alice—if, as Judith hoped, she had seen the folly of her ways in permitting such close attentions upon his part, and had seriously taken him to task, he had fallen back into his proper place.

Judith's colour went and came as she rose to go to the piano, for in a flash it had come upon her that, if this were so, Carleigh would commence trying to follow out Sir Harry's wishes, and this just as she had secured him an open field by her dismissal of Arthur Range.

It was as if from a natural instinct, which prompted her to seek for a protector, one whom she had herself owned to be a very dear friend, that she glanced at window and door, as if expecting to see him enter now.

But all was silent in the garden, where the glow was getting stronger beyond the wood, and no step could be heard in the hall.

“I am not a child,” she said. Then to herself, “I have dear uncle on my side, and I am not for him.”

The “him” was decidedly the man who stood calmly, to all appearance, at her side as she ran through the prelude to a duet from *Il Trovatore*, and for the next ten minutes or so Sir Harry sat gently bowing his head as the sweet harmony rose and fell to the end.

Sir Harry seemed insatiable that night, and kept naming duet after duet, which was played and sung almost automatically by the three performers at the instrument. Judith played in a brilliant, excited manner, while the voice of Lady Fanshaw and Carleigh's rich baritone had never seemed to the General to blend so well before, and at last, almost in shame, he ceased from his demands.

“I shall have you hoarse to-morrow, my dear,” he whispered tenderly. “There, that will do, George, my boy. You've made a mistake,” he said, “you should have been a professional singer—well no, not a mistake. The Queen could not afford to lose a brave, honourable soldier. Thank you, my boy, thank you. Why, Alice, my child, I've tired you out.”

He had seen a spasm as of pain cross her face, though it was calm once more as she sank back in a chair, while Judith made a pretence of taking up a book, but could not keep her eyes fixed upon it.

Just then the butler entered with the chamber-candlesticks to place upon a side table.

“Has Mr. Range returned, Josephs?” said Sir Harry.

The effect of that question was varied.

Judith turned, in spite of herself, to look eagerly at the butler; Lady Fanshaw's eyes dilated, and she gazed before her with a strange, stony stare; Carleigh turned upon her quickly as if dreading a scene.

“No, Sir Harry, I think not,” replied the butler, and he left the room, but only to return directly. “James says, Sir Harry, that Mr. Range told him to put his portmanteau in his room, and he thinks he heard him go up about a quarter of an hour ago. Shall I go and see, sir?”

"Oh, no, don't disturb him. Perhaps he does not mean to come down—packing. Never mind, that will do to-night. We'll close these windows," and the butler left the room.

"Range is a fool," said Sir Robert to himself again testily. "He has gone to bed sulky, and here's my darling miserable because he isn't here. She has done nothing but watch door and window with her ears pricking at every sound like a cat's."

He looked fondly across at his niece, and she smiled back, but with rather a sad look.

"Humph! What an ass the fellow is! Don't deserve her, after all. Perhaps though it will be all right in the morning, and he won't go; hope not, for her sake."

"I suppose it's bedtime, my dear," said Sir Harry just then.

"Hold hard a minute!" exclaimed Sir Robert bluffly. "You've had your Italian stuff, now it's my turn. Judy, my dear, give me my old favourite before we go. I'll give him one more chance," he said to himself.

Judith rose and went once more to the piano, glad to turn her back to all, for there was a strange heart-sinking in her breast. For the last hour she had been owing to herself that if Arthur—she had mentally called him Arthur, and run over in her mind all that had taken place, her every word and look—cruel word and unkindly look at one who had shown himself so frank and true—that if Arthur would come to her again and ask her that particular question, telling her once more of how he loved, she would be obliged to lay her head gently down upon his shoulder and shed such tears of joy as she had never shed before.

She needed no notes, for this was an old, old song, that dimmed her eyes with tears; and as she struck the chords the broad round disk of the yellow moon was slowly rising above the trees, to shine right in at the open windows. Then her sweet silvery voice rang out on the still night air in Barnett's never-wearying old ditty, and all the while she had to fight hard to keep down a sob as the words floated away like an invocation to bid the wanderer return, or, if he would not, to help her seek him where he strayed.

"Rise, gentle moon, and light me to my lover,"

sang poor Judith, with a plaintive ring that made Lady Fanshaw press her hand upon her heart.

The moon rose higher over the peaceful scene and turned the pallor on Lady Fanshaw's cheeks to a more ghastly hue.

Higher still, and looked down where the water plashed and trickled and gurgled, sending bright flashes here and there, glancing amidst the rocks and ferns, silvering branches, frosting leaves, and peering in and tracking and searching the scene of the night's struggle between two strong men. Here was made a broad patch, there a black shadow, and always with the light streaming down to lay bare one particular spot that it took long to reach.

At last slowly, and with the shadow gliding like the dark line on the dial, that black patch passed and passed and glided by till the broad, pale disk of the moon was gazing down full upon a dead man's face !

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE DARK.

"GOOD-NIGHT, my own love !"

The words seemed to quiver in the air of the bedroom as if they had been spoken that moment, though it was nearly an hour before, and Sir Harry was lying by her side, breathing calmly in his restful sleep, while she was awake and staring with her brain teeming with images of the scene in the wood that evening, her vivid imagination interpreting that which she had heard, and seeming to make it plain before her eyes, till, almost exactly as it had happened, the encounter had repeated itself till it was burned, as it were, into her brain.

There was a shaded lamp in the bedroom that gave a fantastic, weird aspect to the rich furniture and hangings. There were strange shadows on the wall, but they had long ceased to be those of furniture—they were trees, dark, whispering trees. That was not Sir Harry's breathing, those were not her own panting sighs that escaped labouringly from her breast, those were the hoarse breathings of contending men, that was the rippling gurgle of the water, that was the splash of the waterfall ; yes : that was the rippling stream.

There it all was again. Oh, if she could but sleep and forget, instead of this weary, weary fevered feeling burning into her brain.

But no, she was awake, fully awake, and she dared not stir ; but how was it all to end ? God forgive her ! What should she do ?

Yes, there it all was once more. In bitter agony, remorse, and shame, true wife still, she was thrusting her tempter from her when she saw that figure indistinctly in the wood. It was Arthur Range, she was sure, it must have been he.

"Look," she seemed to say again, "we are watched."

Then Carleigh had sprung from her—she had seemed to sink back fainting. A mist had come over her, and then she was down upon her knees, with her face covered by her hands, which she had torn away that she might stare wild-eyed before her into the wood, seeing nothing : hearing all. And there it stood out clearly, as in a picture, now.

She closed her eyes so as not to see it, but there it was.

What did he say ?

"Scoundrel, what are you doing here ?"

And that mocking answer that rang in her ears, and would until she died—would it not be better that she died now at once ? That answer !

"On sentry, guarding Sir Harry's wife !"

Then there was a silence, and in the darkness there were the two

men face to face, and she crouched there afraid to move. Then there were words that she did not catch. Then fierce oaths, blows, the trampling of feet, and the crashing of twigs and boughs.

Then a cessation, and a hoarse voice said,

"Yes, every word! Sir Harry shall know it all!"

She had crouched down and listened as the struggle was resumed. There were hoarse inarticulate cries, more trampling, panting, and the rustling of bushes, and then there was a rush and a tremendous splash.

For the next minute, that seemed an age, the water appeared as if it was being beaten up into a foam, and then all was still.

The giddy feeling came back, and the mist floated before her eyes.

There was a blank just then, and she woke once more to the horrible silence, wanting to shriek out for help, but not daring to unclose her pinched-up lips—to get up and flee to the house and throw herself into her husband's arms, to escape from all these horrors, but to be nailed, as it were, to the ground, forced to listen to the low panting noise and the soft splash or two of water, followed by the rustling of the trees.

Then all at once Carleigh was before her, and his cold, wet hand had caught hers.

All this had come out of the past with terribly vivid force.

The rest was confused—a wild turmoil of thought and word. Only that scene was vivid—that scene in which she felt and knew the curse of Cain had come upon the head of the man in whose society but a few short hours back she felt she had enjoyed such pleasure.

Yes, she had been walking upon the brink of a gulf with no one to pluck her back, and now—would it not be better that she should die?

Again and again those vivid incidents all through the night seeming to be burned in upon her brain, and once more and once more Carleigh's words and her replies in a wild turmoil of confusion,

"Go back to the house—be calm"—what mockery!—"play—sing—anything, only be silent!"

Then her words in agony,

"What does it mean? Who was that?"

"A witness of our love, Alice."

Then again,

"What have you done?"

"Forced him to keep our secret."

And again,

"You have killed him!"

Yes, she had said that, and he had stood silent before her, a murderer, the slayer of that frank, handsome youth whom she knew that Judith loved.

She was his murderess too, and the life left to her would be one long agony of misery and remorse. Faithless? No, not faithless. She had not, even in thought, been untrue to him who was sleeping peacefully at her side. But how was she, bearing this hideous secret, to look him again in the face—him, so gentle, so chivalrous and true

—the man whose eyes always gazed upon her with such loving reverence, whose every thought was for her happiness? and in the dark watches of that fevered night she touched his cheek lightly as she moaned,

“Husband! Lord! I am not worthy of your love.”

Then again the long-drawn agony, as in fevered vision the scene in the wood went on and on, and words that had been hastily spoken came back.

“Go back to the drawing-room, I say. You *must* be calm. Be silent, I tell you. Remember there is a bond between us now stronger than your marriage vows.”

Was it? she asked herself as she lay there. Should she not confess all? Yes. Better wake Sir Harry from his peaceful sleep and confess everything. It would be a relief. It would give her rest.

No, she dared not. She paused with her hand raised to awaken her husband, for the consequence came with stinging violence upon her brain.

He loved her so tenderly, a love which she had been ready to cast away; and he loved Carleigh like a son. He had seen them together, and in his noble, trusting faith they had been as brother and sister in his eyes.

Suppose she woke him, her husband, there in the darkness of that blackest of black nights, and told him all—all; that she was little better than a wanton; that Carleigh, the man he had cared for since a boy, had plotted her disgrace, his dishonour, and in his efforts to compass his designs and hide the knowledge of his baseness from the world was a cruel murderer.

“Carleigh is right,” she said, in a hoarse whisper—“it would kill him.”

Six hours before, though a wife, Alice Fanshaw’s heart and disposition had been those of a high-spirited girl. Now, as she lay there, she knew that she was a woman torn by agony and remorse, and at last, in her anguish and despair, she moaned—

“Will it never be day again?”

Never! she felt, as she lay with parched lips. The day would come to others; but to her it would always be black night—this passing night of horror!

Night of horror to her! But she did not know all that had passed, as, with a sigh of relief, followed by one of despair, she saw the first faint rays of the dawn begin to make their way through the closely-drawn blinds.

CHAPTER XXII.

“GOOD NIGHT! GOOD MORNING!”

THERE was something very gentle, almost womanly, in the actions of Sir Harry Fanshaw. “Life is short,” he used to say to himself. “A soldier may be cut down at any moment; the present night

may be his last;" and so day by day he had lived ready for the inevitable.

The habit grew and continued. His days of warfare were past; but in his peaceful home it was the same, and the "Good night!" at Elmthorpe Priory was almost pathetic in its bidding.

In his quiet, affectionate way, Sir Harry made a business of lighting the candles one by one, and handing them to his guests in quite a courtly manner.

Poor Judith was the first honoured, and, as she received the candlestick, she raised her little ruddy lips to be kissed as usual, and then hurried out of the room, so that the tears that were gathering fast should not be seen.

"Good night, my dear boy, good night!" was the parting with George Carleigh, accompanied by an affectionate pressure of the hand and a fatherly look.

Then came Lady Fanshaw's turn, after the "Good night" to Sir Robert.

To her he did not say the customary words, but walked with her to the door, holding it open that she might pass out, and then, with a loving smile upon his lip, it was "*Au revoir!*"

The staircase was dark at that time of the night, and hence it was that Carleigh at one side of the gallery did not see Judith on the other side, where she lingered, hoping to catch one glimpse of the visitor, as it was his last night at Elmthorpe.

Carleigh was waiting at the head of the stairs, his light extinguished, and Judith was ignorant of his proximity as she saw Lady Fanshaw come up slowly with the same fixed look upon her face that she had seen once before. The light shone up full upon her features, which were those of one in a dream.

"She must be ill," thought Judith; and with a girl's ready sympathy she took a step forward to meet her. "It's like Lady Macbeth. What can be wrong?"

She stopped short; for the light of the candle Lady Fanshaw carried faintly illumined Carleigh's face, where he stood with one hand resting upon the broad oaken balustrade.

Slowly up, higher and higher, with the same fixed look in her eyes,—and Judith paused, an unwilling spectator, hardly daring to breathe.

It was evident that, though Carleigh's features gradually grew plainer as Lady Fanshaw advanced, she was not aware of his presence till they were close together and he touched her arm: the ring he wore flashing as Judith watched the meeting.

"Bravely done!" he whispered. "Trust in me, and all will be well."

Judith could not hear the words; but she could see the look of repugnance and horror that flashed across her cousin's face, and the sense of misery that had been creeping to her heart was driven back by one strong throb of joy.

It was a matter of moments; Lady Fanshaw had started as if with horror at Carleigh's presence, shuddered at his words, and quickly gained her room.

Judith felt as if chained to the spot; she could not, she dared not, move, but stood pressing herself against the wainscot as the light died away; and then another flashed up from below as the drawing-room door opened and the brothers came into the great dark hall.

There was a faint hiss as of a painfully-drawn breath, a light step, and Judith heard a door close, while the sense of joy she felt placed her own trouble for the moment in the background.

“I am glad,” she said to herself. “Yes, that is all over now, and, oh! if it would please Heaven to have a good war and send George's regiment to the other side of the world, how happy I should be!”

Her cousin's and her uncle's rooms were in another direction, and a fancy that she might learn something more about Range kept her lingering still with one hand upon her door, through which, now that she had gained it, she could glide like a timid rabbit into its hole.

The grey-haired brothers came slowly up the broad staircase, each with his silver candlestick in hand, chatting pleasantly about something of the past; and a smile played upon Judith's lips as she felt a kind of pride in the fine old soldierly figures before her.

It was a picture full of varying lights and shades, and as she gazed Judith forgot all about the possibility of her being seen.

All at once her heart began to beat fast; for the brothers paused at the head of the stairs before separating, and Judith caught the word—“Range.”

“I'll see if he's all right, and say ‘Good night.’”

It was Sir Harry who spoke, as, going up to the polished oak-door next to Carleigh's, he tapped gently with his knuckles, and Judith could see the blurred reflection of his grey head in the glistening panels.

“Range, are you all right?”

There was no answer.

“Range!” he said, tapping again. “Good night!”

Still there was no reply, and Judith's heart beat faster still with a peculiar sense of trouble impending.

“Range!” said Sir Harry again, and then, after glancing at his brother, who stood there deeply attent, he softly turned the handle and pressed the door.

Judith's agitation was now painful in the extreme.

Was there anything wrong? Or had Range gone—declining to face her again?

The door yielded, and Sir Harry stood on the mat listening.

“Range, my dear fellow!” he said; “Range!”

There was no response; but Sir Harry's face was crossed by a smile.

"He sleeps like a fellow after a forced march, Bob. Can you hear his breathing?"

"Yes; he seems pretty sound," said Sir Robert. "Don't wake him."

"Not I," was the reply, as Sir Harry softly closed the door, stopped for a few minutes talking, and then the brothers parted, their separate doors closed, and Judith glided in and shut her own.

Then, with faltering, dragging step, she crossed to her bedside, dropped upon her knees, and began to sob.

"He doesn't know—he doesn't know, and I could not tell him now!" she cried. "I do love him—I do love him—so—so much, and yet—he could—could go to his own room and—and sleep like that! Oh, it is cruel of him, and he'll break my heart!"

Poor Judith was slightly inconsistent. In her bitter misery and trouble it did not occur to her that she had laughingly declined Arthur Range's advances, and let him go from her side in despair, to hurry away where he could be alone and try to recover his balance.

"He ought to have known—he ought to have persevered—he ought to have had more firmness and daring.

"Disparaging himself like that," she sobbed, "when he's so handsome and manly and natural. I do love him with all my heart, and he might have seen it instead of calling himself names, and looking down upon himself because he is not an artificial, butterfly man of the world.

"And what am I? I declare, poor fellow, he has looked at me as if I were something too holy to be touched."

Judith ceased crying at this, and, raising her face, a happy smile came upon it, lighting up her eyes and showing her white teeth.

"It is nice to be looked upon like that," she said, softly. "He does love me, and he will not go. He'll try again."

Rising from her knees, she went to the glass and let fall her glorious fair hair, when a sudden thought assailed her—

"Suppose he started to catch the first train!"

The thought was terrible.

"I was too coquettish to-day," she said. "I did not mean to be. I did not know all he felt towards me—all I felt towards him. He will never know the reason. It might be by accident;" and, hurriedly rearranging her hair, Judith changed her evening costume for a light, country morning dress, put on stout garden boots, placed her hat ready, and then, after lighting a candle and setting it on a little table, she took up a book and sat down to read and wait for morning.

For Judith's plans were simple as they were earnest. They were these—

"If I go to bed," she said to herself, "I shall sleep soundly till my usual time, for I feel happier now.

"If I sleep till my usual time, I may go down and find him gone.

"I'll sit up and read all night, and be down at six o'clock, gardening. There will not be anything strange in that.

"But I shall look white and dreadfully red-eyed," she cried, in dismay.

Then she closed her eyes, and a pleasant little satisfied laugh made her look more attractive than ever.

"Arthur won't mind," she said, softly; and then she sat back and began to read, but something appeared as if written between the lines—quite another love-story to the one she had sat down to peruse.

It was the story of her own love, and it was so real that it was a hundred times more attractive to read than that of the fictitious personages which the novelist had set out to tell.

Such a sunshiny story, this real one! The troubles were all past, and the fine young hero would perhaps take her to the Far West on a visit now and then, with Uncle Bob for their companion; but his home would be somewhere that his young wife would choose in bonnie old Yorkshire, among the hills and streams that run on and on till they reach the busy hives of industry, where men toil and slave and conquer, and send their victories the wide world round.

It was not a long story, and its end was all in the clouds—every cloud having, not only a silver lining, but great grand ornamental slashings and purflings and rolls; but it was strangely interesting, moving its reader to smiles and then to tears, and again to little happy joyous laughs, with pressings together of two little white hands.

So entertaining was it that, when the clouds and sunshine of the future were reached, it had to be given up and read all over again and again, generally with the reader's eyes shut.

Judith was in one of the most interesting parts of this story of a sweet, pure maiden's first love, when she started up and listened.

What was that?

She could not answer the question. She only knew that she had heard a strange noise as if some lath or piece of wood had snapped in twain, and it was out of doors she felt sure.

For a few moments she turned cold, and thoughts of burglars assailed her; but not another sound fell upon her ear, and once more she sank back to resume her reading, only to fall to perusing that same love-tale between the lines.

And so the night wore on—a night of watching for the morning, but not in misery or pain.

"He is sleeping soundly, perhaps; but he is dreaming of me," said Judith. "Perhaps he is wakeful too."

"I wonder," she said, after a pause, "whether there is anything in what people say of one mind influencing another. Shall I try?"

She sat erect, half smiling at the ideas that thronged her mind, but sank back directly with a little laugh.

"No," she said, softly, "there is no need."

Once or twice she drew aside the blind.

The first time it was to see the moon, in all her majesty, lighting up the garden and the woods beyond.

The next time there was a pale, soft light stealing up in the east, and soon after there was the twitter of a finch ; then the sharp alarm note of the blackbird, and as the sky grew overcast the rain streamed down.

"Will it never leave off?" said Judith, impatiently, as she sat at the open window drinking in the soft, moist morning air. "I can't go down till it stops raining."

It was only five, but there was a figure crossing the grounds down by the woodland path, and she recognised the brown velvetene of Burton, the keeper, while, had she been in doubt, there was the long-haired dog Bess, his constant companion.

The rain over at last, and there was the musical rasping sound of one of the gardeners whetting a scythe, and directly after came the soft rattle of a mowing-machine where another man was busy on the lawn, and she heard a voice shout—

"Who left the tool-house door open?"

"At last," said Judith, tying on her hat and descending. "I don't feel as if I had been awake all night. I wonder whether he is astir."

Five minutes later she was out in the garden—a very paradise to her in the flush of her love and hope—busy with scissors and basket about the flower-beds and stands by the hall-door—a spot that had a strange attraction for Judith Nesbitt that lovely August morning ; but eight struck by the clock above the stables, and then came nine with the breakfast-gong.

Arthur Range had not come down, and, with a look of vexation upon her brow, Judith sighed and entered the long, low room, where the pleasant morning meal was spread.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A NIGHT OF HORROR.

GEORGE CARLEIGH drew in his breath fiercely as he noted Lady Fanshaw's look of loathing, and went into Range's room softly, stayed there a few minutes, and was on his way back when he heard the drawing-room door unclose, and the voices of the two old officers as they ascended the stairs.

Not doubting but that they would be gone directly, he stood listening, and uttered a suppressed oath as he heard them stop, and Sir Harry tap and call Range by name.

"Trapped!" said Carleigh to himself, and he drew back to where his hands rested upon a portmanteau placed upon a couple of chairs.

The tapping was repeated, and Sir Harry again called.

"Surely he will not come in," muttered Carleigh ; but for precaution's sake he stole round to the other side of the bed and stood behind the heavy hangings.

He had hardly taken this step when the door was softly opened, and the light of the two candles cut across the darkness and threw into sight a picture on the wall.

Then followed Sir Harry's remark about his guest's sleep and the hard breathing. The door was softly shut, and the light that streamed faintly through the keyhole died away.

As Carleigh listened he heard the voices for a minute, then the closing doors, and all was silent.

He did not move for some little time, and when he did so he went softly to the window, drew back the blind, opened the casement, and leaned out, looking down and feeling with his outstretched hands.

"No; I was right the first time," he muttered. "Not so good."

He closed the window silently, let the blind fall back, drew the curtain, and then stole to the door, turned the handle very softly, glided out, after listening for a few minutes, shut the door, and gained his own room, fastening himself in.

There were two candles burning here, lighting up his ghastly face as he threw himself into an easy-chair and sat gazing straight before him for a few minutes, as if thinking deeply.

"Plenty of time!" he said at last; and then—"Not half enough!"

He seemed now full of nervous energy, and, leaping up, he took off his velvet coat and hung it on the door-handle, covering the keyhole.

"Not likely," he said to himself; "but I must be safe."

His next act was to take a large spirit-flask from the mantelpiece, take off the silver cup from the bottom, and turn it upside down, so that he could see through the clear glass that it was nearly full of brandy.

"Dutch courage!" he said, with the ugly look coming upon his face. "Dutch courage for a soldier! Well, I shall want all I've got, and a little more."

He poured out a little and drank it.

"Bah! what have I to be scared at?" he said to himself. "I've seen them lie dead thick enough before to-night, and seen them buried the next day. I am not going to be a child now. It was a fight, and it might have been me lying there instead of him."

He screwed down the flask and placed it on the window-seat. Then, quietly unlocking a drawer, he took out a suit of clothes, with shirt and boots, all wet and muddied and torn, throwing them one by one upon the carpet.

"I must, I suppose," he muttered, and after a moment's hesitation he rapidly threw off his evening-dress, and, putting on a flannel in place of the wet torn shirt, he donned the sullied garb as quickly as its moist state would permit.

From a peg in the wardrobe he took out a cricketing cap, and then, after some labour, managed to get on the wet patent-leather shoes.

"I think that's all I need," he muttered. "Ugh! how they seem to cling!"

Shuddering slightly, he turned to the window-seat, and took a little more brandy.

"I could drink a gallon to-night," he said to himself; and then, touching the wet clothes again, he shivered, and then laughed.

"Only water," he said. "It might have been blood."

He looked at his watch, where it lay upon the dressing-table.

It was half-past twelve, and, putting out the lights, he softly drew up the blind, put the flask in his pocket, and opened the window.

"Curse the moon!" he said, as he looked out, and gazed sharply round. "I wonder if that keeper is out?"

He paused, listening for a few minutes, and then closed the window again.

"Too soon!" he muttered; and he began to pace the room softly for a long time, when, feeling satisfied that all must be well asleep, he went to the door, listened, and then, as if thoroughly nerved to his task, went quickly to the window, opened it, and climbed out, holding on by the sill till he had found a rest for his feet upon the large trellis that served as a support to an old glycene, whose lavender racemes brightened the Priory in spring.

It was like a ladder, and, closing his window from the outside, he began to descend carefully, when he turned cold and then hot, and felt that he was discovered, for one of the bars of the old trellis broke with a loud crack.

As he remained absolutely motionless there, clinging by his outstretched hands, he might very well have been compared to some huge specimen of vermin killed by the keeper, and gibbeted against the house upon whose peace and purity he had come like a blight.

But Carleigh's attitude was voluntary, and, finding no cause for alarm, he descended the rest of the way quickly, bent down, keeping in the shadow of the shrubs and trees, and rapidly made his way to the end of the kitchen-garden.

He knew what he was doing well enough, and going straight to the tool-house in one corner, he opened the door, ran his hand along the wall inside, and there was a low clang, something like that of a large bell, as an iron implement hanging from a peg touched the bricks.

It was what he wanted—a spade; and, taking this, he crept rapidly out of the garden, down the green path, by the old ivy-covered priory ruins, and along by the rhododendron clumps, till he came to the rustic gate opening on the path leading into the Wilderness.

"Curse the moon!" he muttered again, as he had to make *détour* after *détour* to avoid the bright light.

At last, though, he reached the seat where his declaration had been interrupted, and glanced hastily round, pouncing with an eager "Hah!" upon something white, which proved to be one of Lady Fanshaw's handkerchiefs.

"A tell-tale," muttered Carleigh, thrusting it into his pocket. "A lady was smothered once by her husband on account of the loss of a pocket-handkerchief. You must not suffer that, little Alice."

He went on along the path and over the rustic bridge, which was an easier way to the spot to which he and his adversary had struggled.

As Carleigh reached the place he started back in horror, for all was in shadow, save about one square foot, where the moon looked down into a narrow rift, and a tiny stream of water made its way in and out among the stones and mossy roots, forming a series of pools.

For there, in the broad, full light of the moon, he could see the face and chest of his adversary; and, as he looked, the eyes seemed to move and the lips to part.

He tore his gaze from the sight, and looked hastily round; but on every hand there were tree-trunks, clumps of hazel, piled-up masses of rock and earth crumbling and threatening to fall into one or other of the little streams.

There were gurgling, whispering noises and soft plashings, but only such as the water made; and, though once a faint breeze came and rustled the willow-leaves, it died away, and, save for the rushing and plashing of the water, all was still.

"Am I going to turn coward now?" said Carleigh to himself as he glanced quickly round at the dark shadows and glimmering lights cast upon rock and tree. But to him they possessed no beauty. He saw not the velvety blackness of the shadows, nor the metallic, silvery look of the moonbeams on the leaves of hazel and pollard beech. To him then the shadows were spots where watchers might lurk, and the lights so many betrayers of that which he wished to hide.

"Hah!"

It was an involuntary cry from Carleigh, and he started back trembling, and dropping the spade.

For all at once there had been a sudden splash and a beating of the stream, as if the dead man had suddenly revived and was striking the water with his hand in trying to get to the side.

"Bah! It is a trout!" exclaimed Carleigh, ashamed of his terror; and, picking up the spade, he went and stood close beside the rigid body, and gazed round at the broken ferns and bent-down hazels, seeing the scene again as he had confronted the man, seizing him by the throat when he said he was on sentry to watch over Lady Fanshaw for Sir Harry's sake.

There was where they struggled first: there, among those alders!

That was where he broke away, but stumbled when he had gone a score of yards, and was overtaken, and the encounter began again, and he swore he would go straight to Sir Harry and tell him all.

Then it was all hot struggle and confusion—now up, now down—both maddened by pain and resistance, and he, Carleigh, by his horror lest Sir Harry should learn the crime against honour, gratitude, and duty to him who had been his second father.

That was where they rolled down into the bed of the tiny stream with its pools, and there, at the bottom, lay the dead!

"It was his life or mine," said Carleigh, as he involuntarily paused, gazing at the staring face. "He had me down beneath the water, and, if I had not been the stronger, I should not have been here.

"Bah! what have I done?—killed a man who would have murdered me. I have saved him from being hung. It was a necessity as much as it has been to shoot down niggers in a war."

He stood for a few moments resting upon the spade, and once or twice he struck it into the ground, but only to find resistance in the shape of stones.

He had made his plans before coming, but they could not be carried out, for it was work for pick and axe to dig down there among the rocks and roots. What was he to do?

He hesitated for a few minutes, and then laid the spade aside, stooped down, after a movement of repulsion, and then dragged the body into one of the narrow rifts where the water gurgled through.

Trampling it down savagely, he stepped away, picked up one of the hundreds of fragments of rock that lay about, alive with moss and fern, and placed it gently upon that he wished to hide.

Then another and another, and then he stopped and uttered a cry of joy.

Inspiration had come.

He was standing on the rocky edge of the streamlet that was not above a couple of feet wide. Where he was the edge was not a foot above the water that rushed gurgling by the body; but the other side was an overhanging bank, from which, perhaps for generations, masses of stones and marl had crumbled down and been swept away by the water. It ran up twelve or fifteen feet above his head, with here and there hazel-stubs clinging and ivy trailing, and to look at it was one mass of exposed roots, crumbling earth, and stones.

He did not hesitate for a moment now, but, going a little on one side, he clambered up the steep bank, reached the top, and forced his way among the rotten hazel-stubs, till he was right over the stream where the body lay.

He paused here and wiped his brow, listening intently; but all was still, and when he held together a few hazel-boughs and looked down he could only dimly see the figure lying beneath him.

Then he stamped, and the earth and stones went down beneath his feet from among the roots in quite a little avalanche.

But that was not what he sought, and, taking hold of one bough that ran up like a pole, he began to sway it to and fro, making the ground quiver beneath his feet.

The trunk that he swayed was four or five feet from the edge, and rose from a mass of half-rotten trunk and root that, acted upon by what was a tremendous lever, threatened to give way at any moment.

So satisfied of this was Carleigh that he slipped back to where he had ascended, and, lowering himself, hurried once more to the side of the gap-like bed of the little branch of the stream.

He had done something already, for where the body lay in what was like a rugged, stony grave several great pieces of sandstone had come down, and needed but little manipulation to be rolled over on to the dead man, pressing him lower and lower till the water nearly covered the body.

Carleigh, panting with exertion, left the spot and clambered up again, passed amongst the hazel-stubs, between whose ruddy stems the moonlight played, and had once more seized the tall pole when his heart leapt to his throat, for there was a rustling among the ferns and the pattering of feet, just as if dogs had traced out the bones he sought to hide.

For a few moments Carleigh could hardly breathe. Then, realising that it was only one rabbit chasing another through the moonlight-flooded dell, he muttered an oath, and began to sway the great bough to and fro, feeling a strange satisfaction as the earth and stones crumbled down fast.

The noise was loud, but no one was likely to hear it, and he toiled away, feeling that in a short time every trace of his deed would be hidden. The leafy top of the straight pole described an arc larger and larger in the moonlit air; the stones rattled down beneath him, sometimes to fall dead on earth, sometimes with a splash in water, and he worked on frantically. He saw in imagination the body covered by a hillock of earth and stones, and the water below running more and more muddy as the streamlet was dammed, and would be already beginning to cut for itself a new bed, or cross at once to one of the other silvery streams whose force it would augment.

He was beginning to think that enough had crumbled away from where he stood, and that it would be as well to send more down from the very edge, when, giving a final drag at the bough with all his force, it gave so much that he nearly fell backwards. He saved himself by holding on firmly, when, with one loud crash, there was a rush, and a huge mass of earth and rock around the great hazel-stub gave way and plunged down into the bed of the stream, taking with the slip him who had set it in motion by his frantic toil.

One large piece of undermined bank had given way and dropped in an instant, with its clumps of hazel, bramble, and fern, down below, completely covering with masses of rooted growth the crime of that night—for the greater portion was in its natural position, and, moistened by the water that would continue to filter through, hardly a leaf would fade. While, still to favour him who had toiled so hard, the landslip would cause no wonder, for the stream had gone on undermining there for ages, and much of the picturesque-ness of the Wilderness was due to the many falls of earth and rock from the steep high banks. In several cases the gardener had planted a few rhododendrons and roots of fern; nature had done the rest.

There was the mass of earth and rock, along with the tall hazel that had been the lever to set all in motion, silvered by the

moonbeams, and above all a new scarped bank of freshly-opened earth; while at the upper end the water was gradually rising higher against the dam, till it had gathered sufficient weight, when it burst a way through a mass of earth, and began forming a fresh meandering course.

George Carleigh, in his military training, had learned his share of the pioneers' and sappers' business, and had he set a dozen men at work to hide his crime he could not have produced so natural and effective a result.

But there was one drawback.

He had been dragged down by the rush of earth and stone, and now, flushed, panting, and bathed with sweat, he lay half-a-dozen feet above his victim, securely pinned by the legs among the rocks and tangled roots.

CHAPTER XXIV.

COVER FOR A CRIME.

FOR quite a quarter of an hour George Carleigh remained motionless, mentally stunned by the shock.

He believed that his legs were crushed, for, after the first struggle, they had seemed numbed, while the horror of his position robbed him of his strength of mind, and he could do nothing but think of the consequences to follow.

He was helpless, and he would remain there till discovered, when probably the object of his toil would be also known. For, even if some portion of the body did not still remain uncovered, he could invent no excuse for being out there in the night.

A walk, because he could not sleep?

Why, then, had he not gone out by the door instead of climbing from the window?

And then there was the spade.

Alice, too, would be utterly unnerved by this new horror—his being discovered, maimed and trapped, in so horrible a way. Without all this, she needed his help and strength of mind to keep her from betraying him; now she would give way at once, and all would be discovered.

The agony he suffered was intense, and at last he lay back, with his head amongst the hazel-branches, utterly helpless; and once more his position resembled that of some mischievous creature of the kind classed as vermin—trapped in his iniquity, waiting till the keeper should come upon his rounds and show him as an example to all.

There were moments when Carleigh felt as if suicide were his only resource; but, had he possessed the nerve, that means of escaping the punishment which was his due maddened him.

Reaction came at last, the unnerved state passed off, and he began to struggle for his liberty, the tall hazel-stem lending him such aid that, by clinging to it with all his strength, he managed at last to

tear one leg from its prison, and after a tremendous effort the other, but only to stand bare-footed; the patent shoes, socks, and the bottoms of his dress-trousers that he had rolled up, were torn off, and his feet were bleeding.

The moon shone down full upon the little ravine now, and showed him the futility of his efforts to recover what he had lost. Hours of digging would be required beneath the stones and roots, and he was too much unnerved for that.

"Another time," he muttered, and he crept down to examine the slip, and see if his adversary were completely hidden.

There was no doubt of that, and, though he stooped and picked up stone after stone to deposit them in places of vantage, he soon desisted, fully convinced that he could do no better than leave all as it was.

"I can come at different times and plant things there," he thought; and now, with a feeling of confidence, he gave one final glance round and crept to where he could sit down on a block of stone and lave his sullied hands and earthy, bleeding feet.

This done, he crept to another place, and lay down to drink with avidity of the cold, clear water, which seemed to clear his brain, and give him more strength of mind.

What time would it be? He could not tell, but his task was done; and, with a feeling of dread beginning to assail him now that he might be seen by some keeper, he crept out of the dell, crossed the bridge, and then, breathing hard, went on from bush to bush, and beneath the shadowy trees, till he was level with the house. Then, darting across a patch of moonlight, he threaded his way through the dense shrubs to the trellis beneath his window, climbed up, and reached his room in safety; remembering for the first time the brandy of which he had drunk deeply before starting and placed upon the window-sill.

It was not there. He could not have taken it, for he had never drunk of it once, and it was not in his pocket.

A cold sweat gathered over his forehead. He must have let it fall there—down in the wood.

He struck a match and held it to the face of his watch. Half-past three.

"Time to find it," he muttered; but directly after he realised the hopelessness of such a search, and gave it up.

"I must find it in the morning," he said, and, lighting a candle, he was about to divest himself of his wet, torn garments and hide them in the drawer, when another thought struck him, and with it came the same cold, deathly sweat to bedew his face.

There was the spade!

He dared not leave the tool to be seen. At all costs, he must get that, and return it to the tool-house; and, cursing his forgetfulness, he extinguished his candle, gazed anxiously from the open window at the signs of the coming day, and once more lowered himself

down and stole back—shivering with an indescribable feeling of dread.

Every moment was precious now, and yet he shrank from approaching the scene of his night's work; but go he must—find that spade he must; and mastering his repugnance he crossed the bridge and went down the path to where he fancied he had laid the tool.

No; it was not there.

His mind was in such a whirl that he could think of nothing clearly; and the more he essayed to recall everything the more he seemed to grow confused.

The flask, too. There was no sign of that, and the day was breaking.

He searched again, hurrying barefoot about in every direction, till, in utter despair from the knowledge that it would soon be day, and he, perhaps, seen by keeper or gardener in this pitiable state, he had to give up the search and once more return to the house.

He did not neglect a single one of his tactics, and he was stealing along from bush to bush on his way to the grounds, and parallel with the house, when Samuel Burton, who had risen early, and, followed by Bess, was on his way to visit certain traps, caught sight of the figure creeping from bush to bush, and making apparently for the lower wood, where there was a path leading through to the road from which the nearest village could be reached.

"That'll do," said Burton. "That's the gainest way for Brackley, mun, and I'll be down there ready for thee when thou comes. Here, Bess!"

He drew back among the trees, and as soon as he was far enough he set off at a trot to cut off the poacher's retreat.

But Samuel Burton's plan did not succeed, for Carleigh had suddenly struck off in the very last direction Burton would have thought likely—namely, towards the house. Long before the keeper had grown impatient his quarry was back in his room, removing all traces of his nocturnal work, and listening to the pattering of a few heavy drops of rain, which soon increased to a sharp downpour that lasted till eight o'clock, swelling the little streamlets down in the Wilderness. For the river rose fast, and the water was discoloured, washing out marly soil, sweeping down twigs, and thoroughly obliterating footprints and marks of struggles; while, as Burton returned through the little dell and stopped short in front of the newly scarp'd bank, he gave his head a scratch and made the sapient remark—

"Well, I always thought that bit would come down first heavy rain. Job for Master Macpherson to plant, and—what's that?"

He had caught sight of something shining, half covered by the rushing water, and, stooping down, he drew out a silver-mounted, leather-covered flask, with a crest on the cap.

"The Captain's!" he exclaimed, "and nearly full."

He was walking on when his foot caught against something which nearly threw him down, and there lying amongst the ferns and

newly-fallen earth was about a foot of the handle of a spade, the rest being buried beneath the earth and rock.

Burton looked at the spade, and then looked round thoughtfully.

"There's been something doing here," he said to himself. "Did that bare-legged chap have anything to do with that?"

He stooped down to pick up the spade and drag it out, but snatched his hands away.

"No," he said, "I'll leave that, and see who fetches it. No business of mine?" he continued, fiercely, addressing an invisible objector. "Everything that goes on outside the garden's business of mine; else how would there be plenty of pheasants in the copses and a sight o' grouse away up on the moor? I'm going to see why that spade come there, and—halloa! not quite washed away by the rain, bare footmarks! Then there is something up, and that bare-footed chap was down here in the night.

"What did he want down here?" he added, after a pause.

"Well, we shall see!"

And Burton left the spade half buried and went off into the wood, just as the sun came out brightly again, and made the rain-drops glitter like diamonds on every spray.

CHAPTER XXV.

MISSED.

"WHAT a glorious morning after the rain!" said Sir Harry, shaking hands warmly with his brother. "I don't know when I've seen it come down so hard for a little while."

"Not since we were in the monsoons, eh, Harry? Well, Blossom, and how are you?" continued Sir Robert. "Why, hey-day! how fierce we look!"

"Don't tease, uncle, dear. I've got a headache."

"Poor little pet," he said, kissing her; and, as he did so, he whispered, "Ah! Judy, Judy, is it the head?"

She escaped from him and ran to Lady Fanshaw's side as, pale and red-eyed, her cousin entered the room.

"Why, Alice!" she began.

"Don't take any notice of me," whispered Lady Fanshaw; "I shall be better soon."

"Ah, George!" cried Sir Harry, "why, you look as cool as if we were in India. Cricketing flannels?"

"Well, no, sir; I had them made for wear out in the Cape. They're very comfortable."

"Capital!" said Sir Robert, looking up at the cool, easy suit. "You young fellows have the best of it. When we were young, men never wore those comfortable free-and-easy togs. It was all stiff stock, high collar, beaver hat, and buckram. Range down?"

Lady Fanshaw's eyes contracted, and Carleigh watched her; but

she went calmly to the head of the table and took her place, looking delicate and very gracefully beautiful in her creamy morning dress.

"No, not seen him yet," said Sir Harry. "Sure to have been down hours and out somewhere."

"Reads a great deal in the open air, doesn't he?" said Carleigh, coolly opening a newspaper.

"Yes, I think so," said Sir Robert. "Can't you persuade him to stay a little longer, Alice, my dear?"

Lady Fanshaw looked up at him in a frightened way, but composed herself on the instant, and turned to Sir Harry.

"Shall I, shall we——?"

She could say no more, but stopped short, gazing helplessly at her husband.

"Ask Range to stay? To be sure, my dear, but it must come from you. Get Judith there to help you, and between you I think you can win him over."

Sir Harry walked to the window, where the head gardener was busy tying up some flowers; for, by an odd coincidence, there was always something required doing in full sight of the windows three times a day, to wit, about breakfast, lunch, and dinner hours.

"Well, Macpherson, you ought to be a happy man," those within the dining-room heard Sir Harry say.

"Yes, Sir Hahry."

"Just the rain you wanted, eh?"

"Yes, Sir Hahry; but it's betten doon my floowers verra sadly; and they a' coovered wi' durrut and sair splashed and torn."

"Others will soon come," said Sir Harry. "Give me that creamy rosebud," he continued, pointing to a lovely *Gloire de Dijon*, which the gardener cut with a great deal of ostentation and handed to his master.

"The rain coom doon, Sir Hahry, in a flood frae the hills, and the wee bit burrnies doon in the wilder ha' overroon, and there'll be days o' worruk to get it reet again."

"But the rain will do good," said Sir Harry, and Carleigh held his paper before his face and closed his eyes.

"I am thenken so, Sir Hahry. There's bin a bit slip, and tons o' airth ha' fa'en and blockit up ane o' the wee burruns."

The newspaper in Carleigh's hands gave forth a crisp rustling noise as his hands tightened upon it, and in intense eagerness he listened to the next words.

"I'll come down and look at it by-and-by, Macpherson," said Sir Harry, quietly; and Carleigh's brow contracted as he saw the General come slowly back with the rain-dropped rose to offer it to his wife, who raised her eyes to his with a frightened, pathetic look, took the flower, and with trembling fingers fastened it in her bosom.

"Harry, I'm starving!" cried Sir Robert. "I wish you'd change your custom here and let people breakfast when they like. I don't see why we should wait for that rude transatlantic cad."

Judith cast an indignant glance at him that was a very ocular arrow, and the old gentleman chuckled.

"I said cad, madame!" he exclaimed. "Would you prefer Yankee?"

"Uncle!" cried Judith, indignantly. "Alice, how can you allow your guests to be spoken of like that?"

"Uncle Robert is privileged," said Lady Fanshaw with a faint smile.

Just then Josephs entered, for Sir Harry had crossed to the fireplace and rung the bell.

"Prayers," said Sir Harry, quietly; and the large staff of servants who were in waiting entered and took their places in a row by the chairs against the wall.

Then Sir Robert read a portion of the morning lesson, and Sir Harry a short, simple prayer in a low, earnest tone, pausing and letting his voice grow even deeper as he came to words alluding to the blessings, the peace, and the freedom from earthly cares that they all enjoyed.

And as he went on poor Judith was furtively dropping a tear or two into her handkerchief—tears of disappointment mingled with something like dread she knew not of what.

Carleigh kneeled with his teeth set and his brow knit, trying to deafen his ears against the words of the prayer, as he called himself hypocrite, and wished that he had not come down so soon.

Lady Fanshaw knelt there, holding her burning forehead with both her hands, stunned and helpless, her only thought being expressed in the words, "How dare I pray?"

And all the while Sir Harry's calm, pleasant voice went on to the end of the prayer, which was mentally supplemented by Sir Robert, who said, as he always did—

"And thank God for bringing me and my brother safely through all our perils of battle and siege. Amen."

Then there was a general rustling noise as all rose, the servants filed out, and Sir Harry said—

"Is Mr. Range in his room?"

"I don't know, Sir Harry," said Josephs. "I'll see."

"Has he been out?"

"Mr. Range generally goes out for an early walk, Sir Harry."

"Go and ask him with my compliments whether we shall wait breakfast."

The butler bowed and withdrew.

"Yes, my dears, you must not let him go," continued Sir Harry, thoughtfully. "I'm afraid he is piqued about something."

Sir Robert looked at Judith, and she darted back a defiant glance, which made the old gentleman pretend to shrink away in dread.

Carleigh kept the paper before his face, and Lady Fanshaw sat as if of stone.

"Anything fresh, George?" said Sir Harry.

"Row in the House about 'Turkish Bonds,'" said Carleigh, coolly.
"Nothing particular."

The door unclosed once more and the butler entered.

"Mr. Range is not in his room, Sir Harry."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DISLOYAL PLANS.

"NOT in his room?"

"He did not come back last night, Sir Harry," replied the butler.

"Did not come back last night!"

"No, Sir Harry, I think not. The bed is untouched, and his portmanteau packed all but his dress-suit, Sir Harry."

"It is very strange!"

"He told Frederick, Sir Harry, yesterday evening, I find, that he was to close up the portmanteau and send it to the station, for he was going away. There's an address label on all ready, Sir Harry, 'Grand Hotel.'"

"We will have breakfast, my dear," said Sir Harry quietly, and he took his place, while Lady Fanshaw bent towards the urn, and Carleigh threw down the paper, saying smilingly,

"That's right, I'm dying for a cup of tea."

He looked full at Lady Fanshaw, who went on pouring out mechanically, feeling the while as if she were in a dream, and this terrible horror must be set aside by her waking.

Sir Robert looked angrily at Judith, but she avoided his gaze, and went on with her breakfast, very pale and quiet, but firm, and determined to show no sign of the pain she suffered. She even forced herself to eat and drink, though every morsel seemed as if it would choke her, and joined in the general conversation at the table, eating and speaking as if to ignore the incident of Range's sudden departure.

No further allusion was made to it till the breakfast was at an end, when, as they rose, Sir Harry said quickly,

"I think it would have been more gentlemanly if he had bidden us all good-bye."

Carleigh moved to intercept Lady Fanshaw as she rose, but she glided by him without seeming aware of his presence, and left the room.

Sir Harry, who was evidently annoyed, walked out into the garden, Carleigh's eyes following him as he took the direction of the Wilderness, and then, after seeming to have a battle with himself, he followed.

Judith had been sitting very still and thoughtful, and now she too rose to leave the room; but Sir Robert, who had been watching, made her start by shouting,

"Halt!"

"Uncle?"

"I said, *Halt!* Here, young lady, I want a word with you!"

"Shall we go into the library, uncle?" said Judith quietly.

"Well, perhaps it would be better," replied Sir Robert. "Servants coming in to clear away, and that sort of thing. Come along."

The grey-haired, fierce-looking old fellow stalked on before his niece as if he were escorting a prisoner, and as soon as they were in the great gloomy library he seated himself behind a writing-table.

Judith looked at him, and the tears started to her eyes as she recalled the fact that two days before she had come into this room and found Range seated in that very place, busily writing a letter, which he had left to go out and play lawn-tennis with her, and sit down under a tree and talk about the hot season out in Malaypore instead.

"Now then, young lady," said Sir Robert, "court-martial. I think I'll call in a colleague."

"No, no, no!" cried Judith.

"I was not going to select George Carleigh, madam," said Sir Robert, sarcastically, "but General Sir Harry Fanshaw, to help me sit upon this important case. His opinions are opposed to mine, so that it would be all the more impartial for the prisoner."

"Am I the prisoner, uncle, dear?"

"Of course you are! Do you suppose I am? No, of course you do not, and you don't want a prejudiced judgment. Go and call your uncle back."

"Please no, uncle, dear. I'd rather be tried by you."

"Very well—there, keep away! I don't want to be kissed and cuddled by an ugly, wilful, obstinate girl. Sit down, miss, and hear what I've got to say."

"Yes, uncle," said Judith, with assumed meekness; and she sat down, keeping herself very upright.

"Well, in the first place, introductory, preparatory, and by way of prologue, I'm going to send a special messenger over to Brackley for the police to come and see if any harm has befallen Arthur Lincoln Range, your uncle's guest. What do you think of that?"

"That it would be very foolish, uncle, for no harm has come to Mr. Range."

"Trapped into a confession!" cried Sir Robert, giving the table a thump. "Then you know all about it?"

Judith shook her head, and the soft, golden, flowing hair seemed full of flashes of light.

"Ah, fibs, fibs, fibs!" cried Sir Robert.

"I did not tell a fib," cried Judith. "I only know that Mr. Range said yesterday that he was going away, and I'm very glad he has gone."

Judith spoke in a hurried, passionate tone, but checked herself as she saw a curious look in her uncle's eye.

"Well, all I can say," exclaimed Sir Robert, "is, that if he has

gone off in this ungentlemanly, shabby manner, after the way in which we treated him, he is a mean, contemptible, Yankee humbug!"

"Uncle! How can you?" cried Judith.

"How can I? Why, you don't care anything about him, and you're glad he has gone!"

"I don't think you ought to speak of Mr. Range like that," cried Judith. "I'm sure he would not be guilty of anything shabby or mean."

"But he has gone off all at once like this. Or no—as you say, he would not do anything shabby or mean. There is something wrong, and I'll communicate with the police."

"Oh, uncle!"

"He has tumbled down a well, or been shot by a poacher."

"Uncle!"

"Or been burked because he is so rich."

"Uncle!"

"Or quarrelled with some Yankee, and they've been settling it with revolvers and bowie-knives."

"Uncle!"

"And Arthur Range has been lying somewhere in the woods shouting *doctor* all night, when there was no doctor to come."

"Uncle, dear, do you wish to send me to my room to cry all the morning?"

"Ah! I'd better send to the police."

"You are determined to make me cry, uncle, and I will not," said Judith, with a stamp of the foot.

"That's it!" he cried; "that's it! The cat's out of the bag. I can see it all now."

"I don't know what you mean, uncle."

"Then I'll tell you. It's temper, or coquettish obstinacy. You've been behaving badly to the poor fellow and driven him away."

Judith's lips parted.

"Ah! don't deny it, miss! I know."

Poor Judith was not going to deny it. Her lips had parted, but no words would come; and she sat there looking blankly at her uncle, with the tears standing thickly in her eyes.

"And you are not sorry for it, miss?"

No answer.

"Now, come here. I've done court-martialling, my dear. I'm going to play dad now. Come and kneel down."

Judith rose and threw herself upon her knees before the old man, who took her to his heart, laid her cheek upon his shoulder, and began patting her cheek and stroking her soft hair.

"Bless you!" he said, softly, "how like you are to sister Judy! There, tell your old uncle all about it."

There was a bit of a sob here, and Judith nestled closer to him.

"Now, then, cross-examination by the judge," said Sir Robert.

"I thought the court-martial was over," said Judith, with a faint smile.

"Begun again," said Sir Robert, "with judge feeling a fatherly yearning towards the pretty little prisoner, who's going to tell him all about it."

There was a halt here to enable Judith to kiss the old man and nestle down again.

"Silence in the court for the confession," said Sir Robert, with playful solemnity. "Now, my darling, out with it. You'll feel better then. Range made love to you yesterday, didn't he?"

"Yes, uncle," in a whisper.

"What a wicked scoundrel! Has he ever done so before?"

"No, uncle."

"What a fool!—I mean that's right," said Sir Robert, hastily.

"Well, did he ask you—you know—did he pop?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Downright popped the question?"

"Yes, uncle."

"And what did you say?"

"That a poor girl with only a few hundreds was not a match for a millionaire."

"You said that?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You're a match for an emperor."

"Yes, uncle," said Judith, archly; "and I'm waiting for an emperor to propose."

"No, you're not. Don't be a little humbug. But, look here, did you refuse him?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Out and out?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Phew!"—a long-drawn whistle. "I thought as much. I suppose you laughed it off, girl-like."

"Yes, uncle."

"Look here"—pettishly—"how many more times are you going to say 'Yes, uncle'? Nod your head: that will do."

"Yes, uncle. I mean——"

A series of nods.

"Then you regularly made light of his proposal—chaffed him like, and wouldn't have him?"

Judith nodded.

"Well, you are a girl, Judy! You want George Carleigh, then? Say 'Yes, uncle.'"

"No, uncle! No, no, no!"

"But you pitched Range over?"

A nod.

"Was he nice and respectful like—gentlemanly?"

"Very!" emphatically.

"And you refused him?"

A nod.

"That's it, then. I thought so; but I wanted the evidence of the prisoner—confession, I mean. Well, there you are, Judy. Rich fellow like that can't put up with such a slight from the pretty girl he likes; and he does like you, Judy."

"I'm afraid so, uncle."

"Afraid, eh! Well, there it is. Nice fellow, too. You ought to have said 'yes.'"

"Think so, uncle?"

"Sure of it, Judy. He's enormously rich, and not spoiled by it. Simple-hearted, true, manly fellow, I call him. Wish he'd been a soldier."

"Oh, uncle!" cried Judith, piteously.

"Made a fine one. He's got obstinate pluck, though he hasn't shown it here. You've seen it, girl. I'm horribly indignant with him for sneaking off like this; but when there's a snub like that! Hang it all, Judy, when a good-looking young fellow knows that he has only to throw the handkerchief and as many pretty girls as he likes will run to him, he feels the slight horribly! Hang it, Judy, it was too bad!"

"Are you very angry with me, uncle?"

"Yes, horribly—savagely. No, I'm not. Perhaps you were right. It was very plucky and spirited of you. Teach him that there are English girls who look down on money, and can be independent. But, hang it all, Judy, my dear, you should have had him. It was a chance in a hundred thousand."

"But you don't wish me to marry a man I dislike for the sake of his money, uncle, dear?"

"Of course not, my darling. I thought it was different, for there was something taking about the fellow. And so you disliked him?"

"N-no, uncle."

"Hang it, girl, you're a riddle! Then why did you refuse him?"

"I don't know, uncle," said Judith, looking up with a face full of perplexed dimples and creases.

"Why, hang it, Judy!" cried the old man, taking her face between his hands, and gazing in her eyes, "you don't mean to say that you love the fellow?"

"I'm—I'm afraid I do, uncle."

"'Pon my soul, you women are puzzles! You're a strange girl, Judy."

"Yes, uncle."

"I don't want you to marry, but it's natural when the right man comes, and I thought this was the right one."

Judith sighed.

"I liked Range. He suited me. He was not what we English—as I said before to you—call a gentleman; but I wish men such

as we English call gentlemen were like him, without the American twang."

"I don't mind the twang, uncle," said Judith, demurely.

"Oh, you don't," said the old man, "eh?"

"No, uncle, I don't think I do. I was used to it."

"Humph! I wasn't. Perhaps I should have become used to it. Well, I shan't brain him now for taking you away, I suppose; but you've done wrong, Judy; you've done wrong."

"Do you think so, uncle?"

"Yes, my dear, for the boy was thoroughly sincere and unspoiled, and those are good qualities in a young fellow now-a-days."

"Don't—don't you think he'll come back, uncle, dear?"

"No; I don't."

"You don't," cried Judith, in dismay; and the tears gathered thickly now. "You said once before that we should see him again, and we did."

"Yes, but you had not snubbed him then, and sent him packing. No, my dear, it's all over; he will not come back unless you write and ask him."

"And that I would never stoop to do," cried Judith, proudly.

"Well, perhaps you're right about that, my dear," said Sir Robert, tugging at his moustache in a fidgety, vexed manner. "It has set my mind at rest about the fellow. Seemed like one's own guest, and it was not pleasant to think anything had happened to him."

There was an awkward silence here for a few minutes, and then Judith spoke.

"I did not mean to hurt Mr. Range's feelings, uncle."

"Oh, no! of course not. That's what you women always say when you are cutting a poor fellow to the heart. I remember years ago, when I proposed to Lady Lorrington—I was twenty-five then—she said to me—There, never mind that. It settled me. I never married. I made up my mind then that I never would. I said to myself, 'If a woman can take delight in giving you pain before marriage, what will she do afterwards?' Hah! you're a cruel set, you women, Judy, you are, 'pon my soul!"

"Oh, uncle!"

"You are, my dear. There's no doubt about that. There, don't worry any more."

"But—but do you think Mr. Range will take what I said as final?"

"Yes."

"Uncle!"

"Well, there! No, then—perhaps not. He made his attack, and you cut up his light cavalry. Perhaps he'll rally and wait his time, and then deliver such a charge as will scatter your defence and bring you to your knees to sue for mercy."

"Oh, uncle, I'm sure that I never should."

"Many a woman has said that before, my dear, but has ended by striking her colours."

"Did—did Lady Lorrington strike her colours, uncle?" said Judith, archly.

"What's that to you, madam? Mind your own love-affair, and don't ask questions. Well, there! I don't care! Yes, she did."

"But you did not marry her!"

"No, I never did, thank goodness! The hollow-hearted jade! Judy, my dear, take my advice: don't play with an honest young fellow's feelings. I think Range cared for you very much; don't you?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Then how dare you play with him, miss?"

Judith shook her head, for no words would come.

"Then you are really sorry for what you have done?"

Judith nodded, with her face working.

"And you do like Range?"

Another nod.

"And you didn't know your own mind, and hardly meant it when you refused him, eh?"

Judith nodded again.

"Humph!" said the old gentleman, playing with her hair and looking thoughtfully down at the troubled face before him. "I seem to know you pretty well, my dear, with all your pretty little wilful, girlish ways. You want something to steady you—to make you more of a woman."

"Oh, uncle, dear!"

"Yes, my child, some big sorrow or another to make you think more deeply. I should like you to have one, and then if it came I should feel that I would rather bear it myself than see a line of care come into that pretty face."

"Oh, uncle, darling, you spoil me!"

"Yes, I do," he said. "But I'm not going to have you made miserable."

"Dear uncle!"

"I shall write to Range to come back."

"No, no, uncle!" cried Judith. "It is impossible; I could not bear it!"

"Why not?"

"It would lower me so in his eyes. It would make me seem so despicable, so——"

"Here! Tut! tut! That will do, young lady. *Halte là!* I did not say that I was going to write on your account. I only want to set a gentleman at rest for whom I feel some slight esteem."

"Oh! But, uncle, you must not! Indeed, you must not!" cried Judith, imploringly.

"Look here, madam!" said Sir Robert; "am I to sit still and see two people made miserable on account of a little misunderstanding?"

"But, uncle——"

"Hold your tongue! You've made a mistake, miss. I'll take care that you are not lowered in Arthur Range's eyes. The poor

fellow will only be too glad to come back. In fact, if he has any stuff in him he'll come without ; but it's no use to be miserable for days if it can be stopped. You see how mad he was, as he'd call it. Couldn't face you again. Packed off at once. There, never you mind. It isn't your doing. You've got to behave as an English lady should under the circumstances. Be straightforward and natural. There, there, Judy, be as maidenly and delicate as a girl should ; but don't let's all be made miserable when a few words from your old uncle to an honest young fellow will set us right."

"All made miserable, uncle, dear !"

"Yes, all of us, Judy, my pet ; for your happiness is a great deal to me. It seems ridiculous to you perhaps, my child, for a grey-headed, battered old fellow like me to talk about his love-affairs ; but that little matter about Clara Lorrington made a trouble for me that has lasted all these years, and if I know anything about my Judy I don't think she'll forget Arthur Range in a hurry."

The little face was buried in his breast, and the sobs and tears came freely now.

"It has all been a mistake, my darling : hasn't it ? And you said 'No' too hastily."

There was no answer, only a closer pressure of two soft little arms.

"And I don't want the trouble to come and steady you—at least, not all at once."

"I—I can't bear trouble," sobbed Judith.

"Yes, you can ; but we don't want you to bear it, my dear. You will have a deal to bear, but you may as well have it homœopathically, and not in one big dose."

There was another little pressure here.

"I shall write to Range."

"No, no, uncle !"

The opposition sounded feeble now.

"I shall do it delicately."

A heavy sigh.

"Now give me a kiss, and go and bathe those pretty eyes, and look severe and draw a few lines round your quarters. Throw up some defences ; and when he comes back let him have a hard fight for it. Keep him off as long as you like, only let him take your colours at last."

Judith looked up with a pretty mischievous light of fun shining through her tears.

"I've forbidden you to write, mind," she said, flushing scarlet the while.

"Yes ; all right, my dear."

"But Uncle Harry won't like it."

"Uncle Harry will welcome any friend of mine, Judy. And now, budge. I say, what a disloyalist am I !"

"I don't understand you, uncle."

"Why, planning for the Union Jack to go down before the Stars

and Stripes. Ha! ha! ha! There, be off now; I've had enough of this."

Exit Judith; and Sir Robert sat down and wrote a quiet, manly letter to Range, asking him to come back and see the writer; and, till that letter was safe in the leather post-bag, Sir Robert did not touch his pipe.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SAM BURTON USES HIS EYES.

It was like some strange fascination drawing George Carleigh on and on after Sir Harry, as, with his hands behind him and head erect, the General walked slowly down the grounds, now deliciously fresh with the heavy rain, till he reached the rustic gate, and followed the path, whose short turf was so elastic, to the seat facing the principal fall.

Carleigh followed at a distance, not daring to lose sight of him for a moment—hesitating about going closer.

Sir Harry stopped in a contemplative manner in front of the seat, gazing at it, and then slowly all about the little valley of running waters; and Carleigh's heart throbbed, there was a strange pricking in his temples, and his face twitched.

For he seemed to see once more, as vividly as if it had been reproduced by another's brain, every event of the past night; and as he stared fixedly before him the fancy was strong in his mind that Sir Harry must be seeing it as clearly as himself.

For what other reason could the General be gazing so intently at that garden-seat and about the path before crossing the bridge and entering the wood?

"I must go to him," panted Carleigh; but he stamped his foot directly, as if crushing beneath it his feelings of dread, and, taking out his case, forced himself to maintain an attitude of calm as he lit a cigar and then slowly followed his guardian.

Sir Harry walked slowly and thoughtfully on till he reached the little landslip, and then he paused, in profound ignorance of the fact that a livid face was peering out from among the rhododendrons on the other side.

But some one else was present who did not quite share Sir Harry's ignorance, but stood against the trunk of a great oak, noting everything, his gun resting upon one foot, his crossed arms upon the barrels, and Bess, the dog, crouching at his feet.

Carleigh was not more motionless than the keeper, as the latter stood there with all the patience of his profession. It was his duty to watch and keep ward, and this he was doing now, though his mind was somewhat misty as to the reason why.

Sir Harry gazed at the slip of earth for some time from one side. Then he stepped over the newly-made stream and crossed to the other side. After this he climbed up and looked at the clean-cut

portion of the bank from which the rock had fallen, before studying the appearance of the little dam of thick water that had been made, and in which the sullied stream that came from the hills above raced and eddied and foamed before dashing away on one side and down the little gorge.

For the sharp storm had brought down abundance of water, which ran of a tawny hue, and formed a thick foam at the foot of each tiny fall.

The sweat gathered in a thick dew upon Carleigh's livid face, upon which the sun shone full, and the keeper's clear eyes noted how it glistened as Sir Harry turned at last, caught sight of him, and beckoned him to come.

For a moment Carleigh's limbs trembled; he was so unnerved by the exertion as well as by the events of the night. But he had a will of iron, and, mastering his emotion, he went slowly towards Sir Harry.

"It is impossible," he muttered. "He can know nothing. Am I going to turn coward at last?"

He drew a breath of relief as Sir Harry turned to him smilingly, and unwittingly tortured the miserable wretch, stabbing him with his words, and, as it were, turning the knife again and again in the wound.

"Come up here, George," he said, as he stood holding on by the tall bough that had been Carleigh's lever in the night; "see what a landslip we have had."

"Landslip?" said Carleigh, speaking quite calmly now.

"Yes; all this mass came down in the storm."

"Ah, yes; I see!" said Carleigh, with a look of interest.

"The stream has been undermining the bank here for years. This tall bough has acted as a lever, and the first strong puff of wind has started it, and down it has come."

"Quite a misfortune!"

"Oh no!" said Sir Harry; "not at all. We'll have Virginia creepers planted to droop down over that blank patch, and this, you see, has come down, so that the bushes are uninjured. That which is beneath them will fertilise their roots."

It was as though a hand had suddenly grasped Carleigh's throat, and his eyes dilated.

Sir Harry continued—

"The roots will revel in moisture, and the alluvial matter the stream brings down. I think it has improved the spot. That stream, instead of running straight, is forced to form a pool and to curve round. No, my boy, it is no misfortune. Lady Fanshaw will be delighted with the change. Coming back to the house?"

"Thanks, no!" said Carleigh, a little huskily. "I shall stop and finish my cigar."

As he spoke he sat down upon a seat formed from an old oaken stump, and, giving him a nod, Sir Harry slowly strolled away.

"Idiot!" exclaimed Carleigh to himself. "Am I to go on always frightening myself with shadows—I who have seen so many dead men in my time?"

He ground his teeth together and smoked furiously, watching the retiring form of Sir Harry till it had disappeared along the winding path, and after a while there was faintly heard above the rushing sound of the waters the click of the latch on the rustic gate.

As Carleigh heard this he threw down his cigar and glanced quickly round in a manner that was foreign to him. Then, as if moved by a dread of doing anything that might seem suspicious, he picked up the half-smoked cigar, took out his silver match-box, and lit it again, to go on smoking steadily as he forced himself to be quiescent for a time.

Burton and the dog remained motionless among the trees, man and four-footed companion seeing everything that passed.

At last Carleigh rose and glanced round once more in the peculiar furtive manner of one who has something to conceal. Then, seeming to become aware of his weakness, he made an impatient gesture and began walking here and there, stooping from time to time to pick little scraps of the bright pink persicaria that grew down by the waterside. To this, as if in an idle mood, he added panicles of delicate grasses, and, all the while, with a strange shudder passing through him from time to time, he searched the grass and shrubs and ferny crevices for the spirit-flask and the spade.

"It was there I laid the spade!" he thought. "No, it was there! No, there; or there!"

A dozen times he made sure that he had found the spot; but his brain was not clear: his fancies were all astray, and he knew it.

He went on picking wild flowers—a pursuit he had not attempted since a child; and as his hands acted mechanically scarcely a spot escaped the strained searching of his eyes.

He drew his breath in with a painful hiss, and then, leaping the little stream, he climbed again upon the mass of rock and earth that he had forced down.

Turning rapidly he leaped back, for a horrible feeling of dread assailed him—something the same kind of sensation that he had experienced when, in the heat of an attack, he had, while leading his men, stepped inadvertently upon the body of a fallen enemy.

It was a similar sensation, but horribly intensified, and a fit of trembling came over him, till there was a reaction, and he leaped on to the fallen mass once more.

"Coward! Fool!" he muttered. "Am I sinking into the mood of a frightened child?"

He again stamped impatiently, and as he did so he laughed mockingly.

"Afraid!" he said. "And of what? There, I could stand here for hours without a qualm. My hand does not tremble. I could master any coward fancy of the brain."

He searched the little trampled clump now in a slow, deliberate

manner, but it was forced, and he could not restrain the laboured beatings of his heart, nor change the livid colour of his face.

There was nothing there. He knew he would not find the spade, but hoped that the flask might be lying amongst the moss and dead leaves, or in some hollow of the old stub.

"It must have fallen into the water," he thought.

Well, what if it had? He could not find it now, the water was too thick. A few hours hence it would be clear, and then he could see it. But the spade! He stepped down on the other side of the heap where the water did not flow, and at the second step he uttered an ejaculation.

His foot had struck against the handle.

He glanced quickly round, and Burton saw every act.

"He's found the spade," he said. "Why, mun, one would hev thowt he'd got a snare there for a hare."

Still Burton did not move, but stood watching while Carleigh bent down, seized the spade-handle, and tried to drag it out.

He might as well have tried to move one of the large masses of stone that lay here and there, for two-thirds of the spade were beneath the fallen mass, and his greatest effort did not stir the tool a bit. The handle seemed to bend slightly, that was all.

He rose, after ineffectively straining at his task for a time, and then stooped and seized the handle again. He could at least snap it off, he thought.

But too much was buried beneath the superincumbent mass. He might have broken it had it been all its length exposed; but the tough ash refused to give way, and, realising the utter impossibility of succeeding, he desisted, stood upright, wiping his streaming brow; and then a thought struck him, and for the next few minutes he busied himself in rapidly collecting good-sized stones, which he threw about and over the handle, bending down grass and ferns, and effectually hiding it from sight in a natural manner not likely to excite attention, while the grass and other growth would soon help to keep it out of sight.

This done, he washed his hands in the running water, wiped them and his streaming forehead, and returned to his seat, where he lit a fresh cigar, and afterwards rose deliberately and sauntered slowly out of the Wilderness towards the house.

The keeper did not move for nearly an hour.

Then, going by a circuitous route down to where he had seen Carleigh busy, he found an endorsement of his supposition.

"Covered up," he said to himself. "Spade—flask—the slip. Him down here last night. Must have been him. I see!"

He gave his leg a slap.

"I see now: he went back to the house while I was watching yonder. It was him."

Burton stood looking in a puzzled way at the slip of rock and earth, and then at the covered-in spade.

"There's a something here that don't concern me, perhaps, and I oughtn't to meddle in it, unless it's to tek care of Sir Harry's property, and---and---her ladyship---oh! here, this won't do. I'm keeper of the game, but I don't quite know what to mek of this. Eh? Why, Bess, old girl! What say? What is it, my old wench?"

Just then the dog, which had been eagerly running here and there, threw up her nose and uttered a low whine.

Sam Burton looked at the slip, then at the dog, and then gave a quick glance round as he took off his felt hat and passed the back of his hand across his damp brow.

Uttering a low whistle, his brown face turned mottled, and he drew away slowly, muttering to himself. Then, turning quickly to the dog, he said, authoritatively—

"Not now, old lass; not now. Here! here!"

Then he strode rapidly away.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"CONSCIENCE MAKES COWARDS."

THE Wilderness had a strange attraction for Carleigh, and he constantly found himself taking the path that would lead him down through the rustic gate to where the bridge crossed the principal stream, and there was a way to the earth-slip that lay in the little rift.

He was going down there one day with handfuls of seeds in his pockets of grasses and various growths that he had gathered in the neighbourhood. These he told himself he would scatter about the mound, as some of them would be sure to germinate, and help to cover the spot with a matted and thick growth.

As he took his way in that direction through the bushes he suddenly stopped short, stood thinking for a few moments, and turned back.

That would never do. In his eagerness to hide all traces of his crime he had been so often that he found that he had been making a regular track down to the mound. It was only faint, but the earth showed unmistakable traces of being trampled by regularly passing feet.

Retracing his steps then he went round by another way, and stood anxiously scanning the spot and the little stream of water that swept about the base.

One thing was evident, the rushing water was cutting itself a deeper bed; but was it widening, and would it in time wash away sufficient of the soil and stone to lay bare that which was hidden?

He turned cold at the thought, but argued after a time that, even if it did, this must be a work of years, and, should a discovery be made, there were no marks of violence on one who had met his death by drowning, and the keenest *savans* would not be able to say that the death was not the result of accident.

"I'm safe," Carleigh muttered, as, after a glance round, he scattered

the seed over the mound and in the interstices among the blocks of stone.

Then he stopped short, for there it was again! He knew it as the same, from a peculiarity in one feather of its wing.

He had not paid any heed to it the first time; the second time too it had been passed over with a casual glance, the day when he had searched so long for his flask, peering everywhere, down through the pellucid water, and coming to the conclusion that if he had dropped the flask into one of the little streams the sediment from the muddy water had covered it over, perhaps never to be seen again.

And now there it was again haunting the place, and sitting on a leafless twig—one from which he had doubtless torn the leaves that night—gazing at him, round-eyed and attentive, as it had perched and watched him ever since.

Only a robin, but it seemed so strange that the bird—the same bird, he was sure of that—should be always watching him. No matter when he went there, the little thing was sure to appear sooner or later with its great thoughtful eyes.

"It is absurd!" he said to himself. "Am I growing childish? It is a bird, and the bird watches me. I shall be believing in metempsychosis next, and that this atom contains the spirit of—— Pah! what idiocy."

He laughed aloud, and then stopped short, for the bird flitted to another twig and watched him, still holding its head on one side and peering at him with the great round eye that, to his distempered imagination, seemed to see so much.

"I shall have to go away," he thought, and the idea came to him like a relief. He could have a run abroad, it would act like a tonic, and he should get rid of these morbid, childish fancies that were ever present. A bird—a robin! "Well," he said, to argue himself into a better state of mind, "suppose it did see and know everything, what then? Would a robin's evidence be taken in a court of law or at a coroner's inquest?"

He was laughing at himself, but the mental suggestion of a coroner's inquest troubled him, and he shuddered.

"Yes," he said after a pause, "I want the tonic of a change. I can leave her now; she will be better perhaps if I am away for a month. Startled by the sight of a bird! Ha! ha! ha! My nerves must be in a low state, that's plain.

"Yes, a run abroad. I'll get away from this hateful hole with its shadows and depressing thoughts; it will make a man of me. Why not go at once—to-day even? The old man will be surprised, but what of that? I will go."

Full of his new-born resolution he glanced furtively at the bird with the thought growing in his mind that he might as well rid himself of its presence by a shot, when it flitted back to the first twig, and its presence seemed to fascinate him.

Fresh thoughts too came trooping through his brain.

Suppose that as soon as he was gone Alice, released from the power he exercised over her, should give way to the horror that oppressed her; and in some wild, hysterical fit confess all!

No, he could not go. There was a bar to his quitting Elmthorpe. He dare not go and leave Lady Fanshaw in that morbid state, it would be ruin.

And besides was he not master now? Was he to leave in the hour of triumph?

Chafing against the invisible chain which bound him firmly to the place, he walked rapidly away from the little dam, and had reached the rustic gateway, when his heart sank again lower and lower with a sickening kind of dread, for there, coming down the path, was something to keep him ever on the watch.

"Ah, George!" said Sir Harry, "there you are. I want you to come and give us your opinion and advice."

He could hardly respond, for behind Sir Harry were Macpherson and a couple of the under-gardeners with barrow, tools, and a load of evergreens and creeping plants in pots, and he needed no telling that they were about to busy themselves over that slip of earth.

If he could have done so he would have sent them all back, but he could only nod his acquiescence with Sir Harry's wishes and turn to accompany the General on his mission.

"I can at least watch and see that they do not go too far," he said to himself, and then he shuddered, for Sir Harry laid his hand affectionately upon his shoulder.

"I have been asking Alice to come," Sir Harry said.

"And—and is she coming?" cried Carleigh huskily, as he turned sharply round.

"No, my boy, no; I'm afraid she is not well. This place used to be such a favourite one with her, but now she seems to have taken a dislike to it, and I cannot get her to come down here at all."

Carleigh turned hot and cold as the General prattled on.

"She is delicate, you see, and perhaps she is right, the place is damp; by-and-by though she may like it again. Some of these days, my boy, when you take to matrimony, you may find Mademoiselle Judith a bit whimsical too. I don't mind: these little ways are pleasant, and what would be objectionable to yield to a man is agreeable enough to give up to a woman."

"Then she will not come down?" said Carleigh, who felt that he must speak.

"No, my boy, no. Never mind, we'll do all we can to beautify the spot in readiness for when she does come. It will be the pleasanter surprise."

With his nerves on the strain Carleigh was for the next two hours watching and suggesting, and always in agony lest the spade should be driven too deep or the blocks of stone loosened.

It was all satisfactory enough to see pots of Virginia creeper turned out into holes to drape the bare bank, but when it came to

planting the mound that dammed the stream the agony began, and with it a shock that sent the blood coursing to Carleigh's heart with a sense of suffocation.

It was the Scotch gardener who gave him the shock, for, leaning upon his spade, and gazing at the mound, he said to his master—

"I'm thenking, Sir Hahry, that with hauf a dizaine o' the men and baskets we could do awa' wi' that loomp o' airth, and set the wee bit burrrnie free to gang its ain gait."

It seemed an age before Sir Harry turned and said sharply—

"What! remove the clump?"

"Ay, Sir Hahry; we could soon dig it oop and lay the airth lower doon."

Carleigh felt as if he could have strangled the man; but relief came.

"No, no," said Sir Harry, "let it be, Mac. I think it will be a great improvement as soon as you get some shrubs to grow."

The Scotch gardener made no remonstrance, but went steadily on with the work in hand, every stroke of the spade echoing in Carleigh's heart as he trembled lest the cohesion of the mass should be disturbed so that it might crumble down where the stream would carry away the earth and wash his secret bare.

A dozen times over it seemed as if there would be a discovery; and, as if fate prompted him, twice over the gardener kicked away fragments of the stone that Carleigh had piled over the partly buried spade.

At last though the final pot was turned out and its contents planted, Sir Harry pausing long to look at the work.

"Yes," he said, "it is better, but I will have something more done yet. Don't you think, George, it would be better if we cut down that side more sharply and let some creeper droop from the top?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Carleigh, unable to contain himself, "not on any account!"

"Well, you need not be so fierce," said Sir Harry laughing. "Have it your own way; perhaps you are right. There! now we'll go."

Carleigh gazed wistfully at the men, longing to stay and watch there till they had gone; but it would only have excited suspicion, he thought, and they were not likely to do more now. So he followed Sir Harry to the house, with the General chatting away all the time, his companion being utterly unconscious of what turn the conversation had taken.

"I shall go mad if this lasts much longer," said Carleigh, as he reached his own room and threw himself upon the couch. "It is as if fate were tormenting me, and always dragging me to the point of discovery before letting me go for a while till she has invented some new torture.

"She has taken a dislike to the place. She will not go down,"

he muttered, recalling Sir Harry's words. "It is unbearable! Everything seems to point to that affair. I am always, as it were, upon some thin volcanic crust of earth which at any moment may break and let me through to destruction.

"What is to be the next horror in store for me?"

He turned white as he sprang to his feet, his eyes fixed and staring, and it was some moments before he sprang forward to snatch from the dressing-table his silver-mounted flask.

"How did that come there?" he said hoarsely, and turning to the bell, he was about to ring and question the servants, but he felt that he dared not; and, letting the bell-rope fall, he stood staring, with the flask in his hand, asking himself how much the finder knew.

One moment he was for making stern inquiry.

The next moment he was in a weak, hesitating state, and dared not stir.

Finally in a despairing spirit he placed the flask in a drawer, and with an impatient gesture decided to let matters go.

"Nobody could have been present," he argued. "Alice would not speak. Some one has found the flask—perhaps in one of the paths. Who knows? My crest is on it, and it has been placed in my room.

"Conscience makes cowards of us all indeed," he said aloud. "Why, if there had been anything suspicious in the finding of that flask the finder would have kept it of course."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"NOT DEAD YET!"

ARTHUR RANGE had carefully packed up his portmanteau, telling himself as he did so that it was high time he went away.

"I'm only fooling myself, and I shall never get a bit further with her. I shall stop on here growing more and more disgusted, and ready to fall out with everybody. So sure as I stay here another twenty-four hours I shall have a furious quarrel with Carleigh, and what good will it do?

"I must be off."

There was the letter to Uncle Wash. Range began and thought he would finish it; but no, it was out of the question in his present frame of mind, so he left it.

He felt that he had been mad to speak to Judith, and yet somehow he did not repent.

Then came the dinner and the scene down the garden with his demand for pardon, his rash declaration, and the proof that he was rather inexperienced in reading the ways of mankind of the softer sex.

"I'm a fool—an idiot!" he said, as he walked slowly on out of the grounds and into one of the broad drives of the wood. "I used to think myself such a strong-minded, matter-of-fact fellow, and here

I am as soft as the greatest greenhorn that ever lived. I wanted polish and no mistake, and experience. First I get into that entanglement at Salzbingen, now I get into this one here.

"No I don't," he said, after a pause. "The mischief was done at Malappore. Well, God bless her, it's all over now, and may she keep her word!

"I shall not marry George Carleigh," she said. Well that does reconcile me a bit; and, as to that wretched business with Lady Fanshaw, I think the lady's common sense and honesty are gaining the day. And yet she was with him to-night!

"My word! how I should like to half kill that scoundrel! One can't—at least I can't—stoop to tell tales; and yet what an atmosphere it is for my darling to breathe! Stop! Hold hard, Arthur, my lad, not your darling!

"Yes," he said after a pause, "my darling—for ever."

He said these words with a tender reverence and in a low whisper, bending his head down upon his breast as he passed beneath the trees.

"There!" he said, as he reached the open road. "Now let's be a man. A good sharp walk to settle my nerves, then back and to bed, and to-morrow morning a cheery good-bye, and a little more experience of life in some other form."

He was a good mile from the house now and walking steadily along the by-lane that led into the main road for Brackley. It was tolerably dark, for Sir Harry's woods were on either side, and two steps from the green border took the traveller in amongst the pines.

It was a favourite walk of Range's, for the scent of the pines and the smooth needles lying deep beneath suggested to him patches of country in the Far West. Many were the times that in the heat of the day he had sauntered along here, reading and dreaming, and but for the darkness he would have been threading his way amongst them now.

As it was he kept to the road.

All at once there was a flash, and a faint light shone out just ahead.

"The keeper, I suppose," said Range to himself, and, walking on, he became aware of something dark on the green border of the road, which soon resolved itself into a fly, whose tall driver had just lit his pipe and was leaning back against his horse, smoking contentedly, while the beast was cropping the grass.

It did not excite any surprise in Range's breast, for the man had probably been up to the house from the town, perhaps to take a fresh visitor or a servant. It was nothing to him.

He walked past the fly, turned and walked back, the soft night-air calming his heated brain. He knew the worst—the dream was over, and he told himself that he was going to act sensibly at last.

The fly was pretty well half a mile behind him now—perhaps further, for the man might be driving on after giving his horse a rest—when Range heard voices, and suddenly noticed two figures in front of him, the one disposed to be burly, the other thin, as far as

he could see in the gloom, between what appeared to be two black walls of growth.

"Ah! here's some one," said a voice, with a strong American drawl. "Say, stranger, we're 'bout lost in this little island. We want to get to Brackley."

"Brackley?" said Range, stopping. "You are eight miles away."

"Guess that's awkward; but we've got it to do. Which way is it?"

"Right down this lane, till you get to where another lane crosses. You take that to the right, follow it over the hill, then take the cut through the woods, and you strike the main road."

"Eight miles!" said the other, in as strong a twang; "but there must be a place nearer than that."

"Nearer?" said Range. "Oh, yes! there's General Fanshaw's half a mile back."

"Is that where the ivy lodge is, where the woman gave us some milk?"

"Yes, that is the lodge," said Range. "But stop! I had forgotten; there is a snug little inn by the trout-stream where you could get a comfortable bed."

"How far away, stranger?" said the first speaker.

"Oh! not above two miles."

"Say, Sam," said the first speaker, "guess we'll go there."

"Or camp in the woods," said the other. "I'm not going to walk eight miles to-night. I can't. My foot's blistered now."

"I can't offer you a bed," said Range, "for I am only a visitor myself."

"Say, stranger, guess you're from over the way, aren't you?" said the first man.

"Yes; I am an American," replied Range.

"Hear that, Sam? Guess you won't find a place now without some one from our great nation having a look round. Well, thank ye, stranger, all the same. Just you put us in the right road for the fishing inn, and we'll make tracks."

Range had said nothing about fishing inn, but he was off his guard, and the man's words did not strike him as being strange.

"Look here," said Range, suddenly, "I passed an empty fly ten minutes ago. If you could overtake that you could get a ride back to Brackley."

"That's the sort, sir," said the second man. "I'm fagged out; we've been, I reckon, about all over this little island to-day."

"Don't brag, Sam," said the first speaker. "We have had a good tramp, though. Good night, and thankye. Think we'll catch the fly?"

"It was standing still," said Range.

"Come along then, Sam. But say, stranger, if we don't catch it, which path do we take for the fishing inn?"

"Well, it's rather puzzling," said Range. "Look here, I'll walk

a little way with you, and put you on a path through the woods to the river. Then you can follow it to the bridge, and there's the inn."

"Guess, Sam, we won't go running after no flys to-night if stranger here will put us on the road. Is it a good inn?"

"Capital, and the country's beautiful!"

"'Tis so all about here—for England!" said the first speaker. "We're from Baltimore, stranger; where may you have been raised?"

"New York; but I'm from Colorado now."

"Glad to meet you, sir. Try one of these. My own raising. I've a little plantation of my own—very small, but I don't raise any but the best plants. I don't want to boast, but you'll find that good tobacco."

He handed Range a cigar which he selected from a large case, took one himself, and handed another to his companion. Then there was a pause, matches were struck, and the party walked on smoking, the light of the matches showing Range that his companions were well-dressed tourists, no doubt seeing the Yorkshire and Derbyshire hills, and each having a satchel slung from his shoulder.

"Little patch of a country, England," said the first speaker; "but, when you try to walk it, you find there's plenty of room, after all. Fine place."

"Yes, it is a lovely little island," said Range. "Every spot is so well kept."

"'Tis so. Say, stranger, I didn't know I was so tired. I'm glad we met you. Guess you are too, Sam. Eh, is anything the matter?"

"A little—faint—I—ah!"

Range reeled, and would have fallen heavily but for his companion, who caught him by the arm and lowered him on the grass.

"That's it, Nathan," said the first speaker. "Now quick; take his legs, and in there under the trees."

The second man put himself between Range's legs, lifted them, and the two carried him a dozen yards or so beneath the pines, and laid him on the thickly-strewn needles.

"Haven't given it to him too strong, have you, Shell?"

"Not I. Take a deal to kill a fellow like him. Now quick; no talk. The lantern."

"But we may be seen. There are keepers, you know."

"Hold your stupid tongue, man! We must risk it. If a keeper does come, throw your handkerchief over his face; we'll say he's ill."

"But his dress—his——"

"Curse you, light that lantern, or I'll——"

"Oh! very well; I only wanted to——"

"Talk and find difficulties. Why don't you begin about the expense? Now, silence! Only throw the light well upon his face."

There was the snapping of a match, a little flat bull's-eye lantern, taken from one of the satchels, was lit, and the second man held it so that the light fell upon Range's pallid face and closed eyes, and

also upon a pair of white, busy hands that were going to the satchel and returning with something glistening.

Then, *click, click, click, click!* there was the sound of a pair of sharp scissors, busily at work, and the light shone on them, and on Range's bright brown beard, while the men were in the shade.

Click, click, click, click! rapidly and cleverly handled, and the scene was very strange. Thick darkness everywhere, save where that pale face lay, lit up by the bright rays of the lantern, and there was something almost ghostly in the effect of those two white hands busy with the keen scissors.

Click, click, click! and in a very short time Range's beard, moustache, and whiskers were cut off close to his face, and the hair pushed aside into a heap that glistened sometimes when the light was slightly moved.

"How long will the stuff last?"

"An hour. Hold your tongue; steady with the light."

Click, click, click! and Range's bright brown, curly hair that he had of late worn rather long fell fast in a heap, first on one side then on the other, from temples and ears. Then his head was raised deftly upon a knee, which was also now in the circle of the light, and the hair was cleverly shorn off quite close, from crown to nape, on one side.

"I'm so afraid of the light being seen," said the second man.

"You always are afraid, Nathan," said the other. "Why, you idiot, there's only just this little circle, and I shan't be long. We might have slipped on the coat, though. I shall risk it now, and finish."

Click, click went the scissors all the while, Range's head being turned round so that his left ear lay uppermost; and in an incredibly short space of time the hair was cut clear again from crown to nape, and not badly, for it was in quite a close, short pile.

"There," said the first speaker; "I'll touch it up, and make him neat afterwards."

As he spoke he thrust back the scissors into his satchel, and drew all the hair into a heap upon that of Range's beard, rose from his knees, and went a couple of yards, where he rapidly scraped a hole in the pine needles.

"Show the light, Nathan."

The little round circle played upon the dark-grey ground where the hole was made; and into this the hair was thrust and the pine needles scraped back.

Just then there was a sigh from out of the darkness where Range lay.

"He's waking, Shell!"

"Not he, my boy; nor he won't wake this hour. Turn off the light for a bit."

The lantern was darkened.

"Now the light coat, Nathan."

A thin grey tweed overcoat was rapidly set loose from a strap

which had held it as a roll slung from the second man's shoulders, shaken out, and in the darkness Range was held by one in a sitting position, while the other rapidly thrust his hands through the loose sleeves, drew the coat over his shoulders, and buttoned it from waist to chin.

"Lay him down, Nathan. That's right. Now the light again."

"No, no! Don't have the light, Shell!"

"Am I to call and shout at you till somebody hears us?" whispered the other, savagely. "Once more, man, we must do this thing well or not at all! The light! If anybody came now, what then? He is our sick friend, and we should give the bumpkin half-a-crown to go and fetch the nearest doctor. Another expense, Nathan!" he sneered.

"What a man you are, Shell! But, I say, do be quick, or we shall fail."

"We shall fail if we are too quick, Nathan! It's all going right. Now, then, the light!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Finish my job."

"Finish *your* job!"

"Yes; I told you it was my department, and I'd do it so that there shouldn't be a ghost of a chance of discovery. Now then, I'm waiting!"

"But what are you going to do? Hadn't we better get him away? Here's the cap."

"Wait and see. The light!"

The circle of light played once more upon Range's ghastly face, and what followed would have been ludicrous but for the undercurrent of danger to the victim.

For the white hands were busy in the shadow once more, directly after they appeared about the face, over which a white composition was lightly brushed, rubbed in over cheek and chin, and then a bright keen blade flashed and played in the light, as one hand held the face and chin and the other rapidly shaved cheek, lip, chin in turn—not a sound being heard but the *rasp, rasp, rasp* of the razor, which was handled in masterly style, till the upper scrape or two had been given, and Range's face was as smooth as that of a child.

"There, Nathan, I didn't think when they made me barber's mate at Sing-Sing it would turn out so useful as this."

"What a man you are, Shell!" muttered the other, in a voice full of scared admiration.

"What a man you are not—to hold a light," said the other, replacing his implements in his satchel.

"You have done now?"

"Not quite. Only the finishing touch wanted," was the reply; and in the light one of the white hands was rapidly inserted in a loose old glove.

Then a bottle was taken out of the bag and a piece of sponge, the bottle uncorked, after being shaken, the sponge saturated, and

the smooth face, forehead, and head quickly rubbed over with the fluid, which was also carefully applied down the neck, a handkerchief being used to protect collar and tie.

It was all very quickly done, and there was something even more weird now in that bright patch of light to see those quick hands—one white, the other brown—busy over the smooth, ghastly face, which rapidly assumed a creamy and then a yellowish hue.

"There," said the first speaker, "I call that a job, Nathan. His head's dry enough; put on his cap, and make yourself happy. I can do without the light; blow it out! Stop a moment! Let's see if I've got all my tackle."

The light was played about the ground for a moment and the various articles replaced in the satchel.

"There, Nathan, blow out the light, my lad, and, 'like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wrack behind.'"

Instant darkness was the result.

"I breathe more freely now," said the light-bearer.

"Well, for the matter of that, Nathan, so do I. It is, as the French fellows say, *un fait accompli*. I wish I had had another look at his phiz."

"It was quite right—a wonderful transformation."

"Yes, I take credit for it, Nathan. It would puzzle his dearest friends—even old Wash Range—to know him now. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Hush! don't be foolish. What are you laughing at?"

"I was wondering what Sarah will say to her handsome flame when she sees him."

"Hush! don't—stop talking," said the other, eagerly. "Now, then, what next?"

"Next? Oh! no hurry, my dear Nathan. Our safety lies in taking matters extremely coolly. You see the value now of doing matters thoroughly, as I have. You didn't know I had those traps in my hand-bag."

"No, my dear boy. It is wonderful."

"Rubbish! It's foresight, my dear Nathan; now take a sip of this to put some courage in you. I told you I'd manage the trick. Here it is—done."

"Not done yet."

"Yes; done. The rest is as easy as can be. How the bird walked into the trap."

"Yes; capitally!"

"Lucky for him that he did. Saved him some unpleasantness, and a dose of something worse; for I meant to have him to-night somehow."

"Shell, you're a genius," cried Nathan, passing back the flask to his companion. "But where is his cigar? It might tell tales."

"Not it! It might half poison some foolish boy who found and finished it. That's a strong brand, that from Baltimore, Nathan. But make your benevolent mind easy; it's in my pocket."

"Oh!"

"Now, then, got everything?"

"Yes."

"Then let's take him to the side of the road. One moment, though; take off those rings and put 'em in your pocket."

Range's fingers were stripped, while busy hands removed his watch and chain.

"Now for his pocket-book, Nathan. That's it. We'll see what's in it when we get a chance."

"Shall—shall I carry the pocket-book, Shell?"

"Curse you for a suspicious hound, Nathan!" cried the other, fiercely. "I begin to wish sometimes that I hadn't joined you in this job."

"I—I beg your pardon, Shell, I do, indeed," said the other, humbly. "I have been so shuffled, you know, it makes me suspicious. There, I won't be so again."

"Take his legs," said Sheldrake, gruffly. His companion obeyed, and the insensible man was borne to the grass at the side of the lane, and seated with his back against a tree.

"He's going to wake," said Nathan, in a frightened whisper.

"No, he is not," said the other. "Didn't you see?"

"See? See what?"

"I gave him a lozenge while you were clearing up. I had to force his teeth open with the scissors, and he has it fast. Now, then, get the fly up, and let's be off. Why, Nathan!"

"What? What is it? Anything wrong?"

"Oh! we'll get over it in the fly; but it shows that, however careful, we are——"

"What have you done? What have you missed?"

"I forgot to do his hands."

"Hah!"

"And you didn't remind me when you took off his rings."

"No!"

"It wasn't a question of coin, Nathan Mewburn. There, go and get up the fly."

Mewburn went off at a rapid pace, leaving his companion beside the insensible man; and, as soon as he was alone, Sheldrake said to himself—

"I don't think I've forgotten anything now. We won't keep up the colour; but till we have him safe at home, I don't think any one is likely to ask unpleasant questions about the dark gentleman in a dangerous state; and I don't think they will mix him up with Arthur Lincoln Range, our dear American friend."

He stood there listening, with Range's head propped against his leg, to keep him from falling, as he waited for the fly, the woods near Sir Harry Fanshaw's country home being rather prolific of adventure upon that soft, dark night.

"Humph! there they come," said Sheldrake, with a satisfied sigh. "Just done in time—there's the moon rising above the trees."

The fly was soon beside the insensible man, and he was lifted in. Mewburn followed, and Sheldrake mounted beside the driver, who immediately went off at a rapid rate, under the direction of the man at his side.

Range sank back in the corner of the fly, where he had been placed, and seemed to be sleeping heavily. He was supported by pillows, and a couple of planks had been laid from seat to seat, with cushions thereon, so that, in his character of invalid, his legs might rest in a horizontal position; while his captors were so careful that they had provided a rug to keep away the cold night air.

Not a pleasant position for a young man, an hour before full of life and action, if not hope; but far better than lying, as Lady Fanshaw supposed, stark and stiff in the wood beyond the Wilderness, and she in some sort answerable for his death.

Sheldrake had made his plans, and hour after hour that fly went steadily on, till after the first halt made for refreshing the horse.

It was just midnight when the unwearying eye of the law fell upon it, with the result that about one o'clock, as the fly was going steadily on just beyond the village where the halt had been made, a policeman stepped out from beneath some trees, and uttered the magic word—

“Stop!”

CHAPTER XXX.

A LOAD ON A MAN'S MIND.

GEORGE CARLEIGH would have been less easy still in his mind if he had known of an interview that had taken place.

Samuel Burton had settled himself upon an oak trunk, close to the track leading from the Priory to the village. His gun rested against his seat, and the afternoon sun shone down upon the leaves, forming a chequered light through the path.

“Now, old gal,” he said to his dog, “just you go out there in the path, and tell me if she be coming. Watch!”

The dog looked up at him intelligently, and then trotted a few yards along the woodland track and couched, with ears pricked up and nose pointed, watching intently and listening, as she had often before watched and listened, for the coming of poachers in the wood.

“Joost time for a comfortable smoke,” said Burton, taking an ugly little black pipe from his pocket, and proceeding to fill it from a large pouch formed from the skins of moles. “Joost time for a comfortable smoke.”

He put the pipe between his lips, replaced the pouch, and was in the act of striking a match upon a little brass box when he stopped short, caught by a thought.

Sam Burton was a splendid specimen of a manly Yorkshireman as he sat there with his brown face lit up by the falling shower of sun-rays; but for a few moments he looked utterly inane. Then, as he

carefully replaced the match, took the pipe from between his lips, and wiped them with the back of his hand, a singularly comical, half-bashful smile crossed his face.

"Not now," he said; "not now. I might happen to—and she'd smell a man's mooth."

Burton smiled and shook his head, and, having got rid of his pipe, took up his gun and began polishing the barrels, as it lay across his lap, with his red cotton handkerchief.

Then he grew very serious, and his brow wrinkled as if he were in deep thought, the result of which was that he set down his gun and took out Carleigh's flask from his breast pocket, shook it to hear the brandy gurgle inside, drew off the cup, and looked through the clear glass. Then he replaced the cup and unscrewed the top and smelt it.

"Brandy, sure enough," he muttered; and he seemed to be about to taste, but shook his head, and screwed the silver top on quite tightly.

"Brandy i' the mooth is as bad to a lass as 'bacco,'" he said. "And no wonder. Her little mooth's as sweet and as pretty as a rosebood, and, if a man is allowed to kiss it, why, he ought to mak' the best of hissen."

Samuel Burton smiled again—a weak, satisfied smile, but only to grow serious directly.

"Things look straänge and bad," he said, softly. "I don't like it, and I don't know what to be doing. I seem maazed like, and that's one o' the evils of a lad not hevvin' a wife. Now, if a lad were wed, he'd just go home and say to his lass—'Here's a bit of a fix like, my gal; what shouldst ta do if thou wert me?' Then she'd say what, and there'd be an end o't."

He sat with his arms resting on his extended legs, and his fingers touching at the tips, staring straight before him into the wood, and he shook his head again.

"I don't like to be mixing o' mysen oop wi' it," he muttered; "and yet I'm obliged to, and all the while I don't know what to do."

"Why, dal it all!" he exclaimed, snatching off his soft hat and wiping his brow with the back of his hand, "it's a hanging business, as sure as 'sizes is 'sizes, and—oh, dear heart! it's a straänge business for Sir Harry and poor Miss Judith!

"Here, I'll tell Milly all about it, and ask her advice."

"No, I wean't. She's too young and pretty to have such a trouble as this in her head. Well, thank goodness, I was born a poor man, and not of the likes o' them. Eh! but it's a straänge matter. I thowt often as there were nowt worse in the whole world than poaching, and a keeper getting killed now and again, but this is ten times worse, from what's a-hanging to it on the other side."

A low whine and a short bark from Bess changed the keeper's thoughts.

"Good dog!" he said, starting up. "Here she coomes, then."

He was right, for at the end of a minute there was a quick step,

and, looking very bright and rosy in her light dress and round, be-ribboned hat, Milly, her ladyship's maid, came into sight, to give an affected start of surprise as she found herself facing the keeper.

"Why, it's Mr. Burton!" she said, coquettishly.

"Yes, Milly, it be Sam Burton, thy true lover, waiting to have a look at thy bonny faäce."

"Oh! if you're going to talk such nonsense as that, Mr. Sam, I'm going on."

"Eh! but I'd talk nonsense to thee all day long if thou'lt sco'd me i' that way, my lass. It seems to do me good, and makes a man happy like."

"He must be very easily made happy, then," said Milly, with a toss of her pretty head.

"He is, lass. That's so," said the keeper, earnestly. "Just a few words from the lips of the lass he loves. And, even if it be scolding, he likes it, and it mak's him think of the time when it wean't be scolding, but all kindness and love."

"Some people get thinking of what they'll never have," said the girl, pertly. "I know I should never say such things to any one."

"Nay, don't thou say that, my lass; there's no knowing."

"Oh, but there is!" said Milly, colouring a little. "I should never care for a man who was ready to run down his betters."

"Nay, Milly, I wouldn't run down my betters," said Burton, quietly. "What I said was well meant, my lass. I like Sir Harry, and I've sarved him since I was a boy. He's a good master to me."

"Oh! Sir Harry's right enough," said Milly, sharply; "but he's dreadfully o'd."

"Nay, my lass, I don't call a man owd who has all his wits, and can set a horse at a stiff fence, and walk his keeper down after the birds. What's grey hairs got to do with it, eh?"

"Ah, well! we shall never agree about that," said Milly, pertly. "You think Sir Harry's the best man in the world, and I think my lady is the best woman, so we needn't talk no more."

"Well, we wean't, lass, about that. But don't go yet, my bairn!"

"Why, what's the use of my staying?"

"Oh! thou couldst tell me a bit o' news."

"Oh! there's no news here. Mr. Range hasn't written to Miss Judith, and she's making a fight over it."

"Makkin' a feight, lass?"

"Yes. Pretending she don't mind a bit, and all the time she's longing to see Mr. Range again."

"Poor lass!" said Burton, in so deep a tone that Milly started.

"Don't talk in that churchyard tone o' voice, Sam Burton," cried the girl; "you quite give me the chills!"

"Did I, bairn?" he said, tenderly. "I'm sorry. Why, Milly, I wouldn't have thou made unhappy for all the money Sir Harry has in the bank!"

"Such stuff!"

The girl gave her pretty shoulders a shrug, but her eyes and cheeks

told of her satisfaction as she felt how she—a little bright-faced girl—influenced and ruled the fine stalwart man at her side.

"Nay, Milly, my lass, it be no stooff," said the keeper, smiling.

"How did you know I'd been down to the village?"

"I saw thee go, dear, and it made my blood seem to dance i' my veins at thought o' seeing thee and speaking to thee again."

"Why, Sam," said the girl, panting with pleasure, but with a coquettish laugh, "if you talk like that I shall some day be thinking that you really do love me."

"Nay," said the keeper, tenderly, and with a manly pride and veneration for the little thing, "thou'st knowed it for a long time. But there, I wean't worry and fret thee wi' my words. I'm going to wait, my bairn, till the day when thou comest to me and says—'Theer, Sam, I wean't tease and play wi' thee no more. It weer only because I weer so young, and not sure o' thee, because thou wert such a much older man than me. But now I know that I'm all the world to thee, and I'm going to put away all my sharp, teasing, and heart-pricking words, and be thy true little wife.'"

"And do you think I'm ever going to say that to you, Sam Burton?" said the girl, sharply, but with a peculiar huskiness in her voice.

"Yes, Milly," he said, with a grave smile. "Some day thou wilt; and now I want thee to do me a favour."

"You want to borrow some money, Sam?"

"Nay, not I, my bairn," said the keeper, proudly. "I've got a bit saved up; and if I hadn't I couldn't tak' money from a lass."

Milly's heart gave her a twinge for her words, due to an unpleasant little affair at her last place with a young groom.

"I—I beg your pardon, Sam," she said, putting out her hand.

"Bless thee for that," said the keeper, taking the hand in both of his and stroking it reverently before raising it to his lips; and somehow that simple manly action had a wonderful effect upon the little maiden, who had been accustomed to the boisterous love-making of the servants' hall. "Nay, my lass," he said, taking the spirit-flask from his pocket, "I want thee to tak' this flask and put it in the captain's room. It be his, and he lost it; and if it be put back there'll be an end of it."

"Why don't you give it to the captain yourself, or take it up to the house?" said the girl, quickly.

"Oh! I've two or three reasons for it, Milly," said the keeper, softly stroking the little hand. "One is, I don't like the captain. He tried to mak' love to thee."

"I couldn't help it, Sam; I couldn't, really," she said, earnestly, and this time she laid her other hand on his.

"I know it, my lass; I know it," he said, looking down with passionate tenderness at the little upturned face. "Well, that's one reason; and I don't want him to know I found it."

"But why?"

"Oh! I hardly know, my lass. Perhaps, for one thing, if he found

I'd sent it back, he'd be for giving me half-a-crown, and I don't want the captain's half-crowns."

Milly noted that the keeper's face grew darker as he spoke, and he continued—

"I won't say anything about what you scolded me for."

"No, don't, Sam; and come, now, you haven't seen anything of that kind lately?"

The keeper was silent.

"Now, Sam," cried the girl, passionately, "I didn't want to quarrel this time. I know you haven't seen anything of the kind; for her ladyship has been quite poorly lately ever since Mr. Range went away, and so has Miss Judith."

The keeper nodded.

"Then confess, now, you were wrong."

"I hope I was, Milly," he said, sadly. "But there, my lass, I'm as glad as glad that what you say's true. No, I haven't seen them together lately."

"There, then, I'll forgive you," she said. "And—well, yes, I'll take the flask. But you've some other reason, Sam."

"Have I?"

"Yes; I'm sure you have, sir. Come, now."

"Well, yes, I've another reason," he said.

"Then tell it me."

The keeper paused for a minute, during which he patted and stroked the little hand before saying—

"I wanted to show thee that I can trust thee, Milly. There, tak' it and say nowt to nobody, my lass, and—may I, my bairn?"

Milly did not answer, but stood with her head half-thrown back, as if she were gazing in the keeper's face; but her eyes were closed, and she did not open them as he bent down and kissed her lips once, gravely and tenderly, before gazing after the retreating form.

For, as if electrified by the touch, Milly had turned with the flask in her hand, and ran rapidly down the woodland path.

"Heaven bless thee, my pretty bairn!" said the keeper, softly, as he watched the retiring figure. "I'd have told thee all I think, but it's better for thy young life to be wi'out any thowt o' sin and wrong, and maybe it's a big mistake; but I don't know—I don't know. I see Master Range in the wood that night, wandering about angry and wild like; and it seems to me as like this as can be: Master Range is in love wi' Miss Judith, and he finds out as she's to be wed to the captain, and it maks him angry and jealous. They didn't like one another; I've seen it a dozen times. I've seen the captain scowl at him as if he'd like to kill him. Then Master Range comes upon him and her ladyship down there in the Wilderness, and calls him, and they quarrel and fight; and the captain hits him harder, p'raps, than he meant, and then he hid it all."

Burton picked up his gun, and stood resting his hands upon it, with his brow knit and his eyes fixed on vacancy.

"What shall I do?" he said at last, passionately. "If it weern't

for Milly I'd go reight away and get shut of it all. It 'most drives me mad to think of it; and if it weern't that I feel sometimes as if it may be all a mistake, and that Master Range hev gone away, I couldn't bear it in my mind. I couldn't feel worse if I'd shot a poacher mysen and hidden it up.

"What can I do? If I go to a magistrate and speak, perhaps it's all wrong and I lose my plaâce. If it's all true—ah!"

He checked himself, for he could not give utterance to his thoughts; but they rushed through his brain, and he conjured up a horrible discovery—Miss Judith mad with horror at her lover's death, Lady Fanshaw disgraced, and Carleigh in the hands of the police.

"And," said Burton, half aloud, "it'd be the death of as good a mester as ever lived. Nay, Sam, thou'lt go to thy grave, my lad, wi' a big secret in thy breast, and thou'lt never even tell't to thy bonny little wife. But it's a sore trouble and burden for a man to have put upon him; and that lad—ah! he's a black 'un, the captain, a black-hearted cur; and it'll be a glad day for Elmthorpe when he's gone."

Burton thought for a moment, and then he ground his teeth and clenched his fists.

"No!" he said fiercely; "no! Some day they'll be wanting to marry him to Miss Judith, poor bairn; but I can and will stop that, for I'll tell him to his face all I know.

"'Liar!' says he.

"'Liar yoursen!' says I; and I'd tak' him and show him where he hid the spade, and——"

Burton paused; for the thought came to him once more that had inspired him with the desire to return the captain's flask without his knowing from whence it came.

"Nay, I must tak' care," he said, "or mebbe I too should be a dead man, for I wouldn't trust him if he knew that I could tell a tale."

Just then the dog uttered a low whine.

"Ah! Bess, lass, I'm not angered wi' thee."

Bess looked at him with her great intelligent eyes, and gave her bushy tail a swing to and fro, dropping into her place directly after at the keeper's heel, as, throwing his gun under his arm, he strode on beneath the shade of the great trees, his head hanging and his shoulders bent as if with the burden of the great secret that pressed him down. ▽

CHAPTER XXXI.

DOCTOR PARKINS'S PATIENT.

"HUSH, constable!" said Sheldrake, from the box. "You'll wake him."

"Wake, eh? Here, get down! I want to see what's going on here!"

"My good man, I do not understand you!" said Sheldrake, blandly, as he slowly descended like one not accustomed to get up and down so awkward a place.

"Ah, then, you soon will!" said the constable, staring in at the fly window, and then opening the door.

"Ah, I see!" said Sheldrake, smiling, and then indulging in a little chuckle. "Dr. Parkins, here is a constable who thinks we have been committing a burglary somewhere."

"Eh, what?" said Mewburn. "I was asleep. Be quiet, please, he is in a nice gentle doze!"

The constable made the light of his bull's-eye lantern play over Mewburn's face, and then over that of Range, who was lying back insensible.

"Fact is, constable, we're bringing Dr. Parkins's patient from Ketloch by easy stages. The heat of the day increases his fever. Pray don't wake him! He's so much better now that we should not like to lose ground."

"Been badly, eh?" said the constable, who was puzzled, and horribly disappointed, for he had been thinking for some time about what he called "swag."

"Yes, been very badly. West Indian gentleman. Yellow fever. Come over here to try and get it out of his system, constable. But he is decidedly better now."

The constable made his light play over the fly, which was an old-fashioned, serviceable affair; then over the horse, a strong, useful, heavily-built animal; and, lastly, over the driver, a very big man, in the orthodox drab coat and tall hat with broad silver band.

Nothing could have been more respectable, except the time, and the constable felt that his position was growing absurd.

"Fact is, sir," he said to the stoutish, bland gentleman who offered these explanations, "we're obliged to look very sharp about here—poaching, burgling, and that sort o' thing. We get some ugly customers from Brackley, Sheffield, and Roth'ram. 'Bliged to look out sharp, you see. Beg pardon for stopping of you. Good night, sir, good night."

"Good night, constable. Would you mind shutting the door, gently?—that's it. And now if you would not mind. That's the way—a little touch of gout. Easy—steady—give me your hand, John. There I am!"

The constable gave efficient aid on one side, and the driver held out a strong, thickly-gloved hand, the result being that the bland gentlemanly man reached his seat, said "good night" once more to the constable, and then "Go on, John," to the driver.

The horse jogged slowly on, the wheels rolled, the constable felt disappointed, but that he had done his duty, and Sheldrake said, quietly—

"It's my belief, Jack, that, with a sufficiency of coolness and a plan well laid, a man might do anything."

"Don't you be too sure," said the driver. "We're in Yorkshire yet, and in spite of all your planning I can't quite see him safely locked up."

"Have patience, then, my dear boy, and you shall. By the way,

Jack, you make a splendid driver. I'd take to a fly if everything else failed."

"Humph! Thank you for the advice."

"Don't name it, my dear boy."

"I suppose I may light a cigar now?"

"If you wish to try and spoil my plans. No, my dear Jack, when we halt you may light that dirty pipe and attend to the horse."

"Hang the horse!" muttered the driver.

"Don't be an idiot, Jack."

"How long am I to keep on driving at this rate?"

"Say six miles an hour. It's now one. Steadily on, Jack, till breakfast-time. We shall be at Rotherham then, and the rest will be easy."

"I hope it will."

"If you talk like that, Jack, I shall think you hope it will not be easy. There, there! Do be cool and patient. You are so horribly anxious to get back to your fair wife that your temper is not improved by absence, Jack. Look here! drive steadily away, and think of nothing but the reward."

The horse received a sharp flick, and ambled on, neither of the men on the box speaking for a while.

At last the driver said in a low voice—

"Think you can keep him quiet till we get him there?"

"Sure of it. I've calculated exactly."

"And you are going to stay at Rotherham?"

"Look here, Jack," said the other, "I've been very quiet because I wanted to digest my plans. Now I'll tell you exactly what I'm going to do. We're right so far."

"Well, yes, I suppose so."

"We are right, my dear boy. Well, we shall go steadily on to Rotherham, which is right away cross country, and in quite another route. There we shall stop and breakfast. Our patient will be put to bed, the horse into the stable. At 2.25 there's a good train on. You shall get a fly from the station, and I'll engage a compartment for the sick gentleman. We shall take him there, and a shilling or two will make the porters on our side. You will see that a carriage will be found for us in a siding, and coupled on to the train when it comes, and then off we go."

"But it will excite suspicion."

"What, to see a dark invalid helped into a carriage under the guidance of his medical man? My dear Jack, poor humanity has so many sick in its midst that such scenes take place every day."

"And the fly?—the horse?"

"The fly and horse will stop in the stable till called for in a day or two, when the sick gentleman comes back from town, where he has gone to undergo an operation."

"But we are not coming back."

"Certainly not, sweet innocence!—mind and don't run us into that ditch. The landlord will wait and calculate how much we owe

him for rent and keep, and at last he will advertise in the local paper that, if the horse and fly are not claimed by a certain date, they will be sold by auction to clear expenses."

"All likely to excite suspicion."

"In you, because you have hold of the thread; but to one who has to seek it, depend upon it he will never put that and that together. My dear Jack, my plans are too safe, I am sure. Suppose, at the very worst, the dark invalid gentleman were suspected to be Range. Well, they might trace him to Rotherham, where train was taken to King's Cross. There it would be lost."

"How?"

"Because the people at the station would not see where we go. We have no luggage, and we'll make him walk to the underground station. The porters and people are too busy to notice what goes on under their noses. I'm going to play boldly, and I depend much upon the disguise."

"But they will know that Range has been kidnapped, and the detectives all over the country will be on the track."

"Who will know that Range has been kidnapped?"

"Why, everybody."

"How will they know it?"

"Why, they must."

"Nonsense, my dear boy! Don't raise bugbears. Nobody saw him taken; nobody knows he has been taken. He is missing from Sir Harry Fanshaw's—well, he may have taken it into his head to go. He may have tumbled into the river. The only thing against us is that a dark invalid gentleman was taken through the country by night in a fly because he could not bear the heat of the day. The policeman knows that. There you have it."

"Well, isn't that enough?"

"It might be, my dear Jack, but I feel satisfied that it will not be. Even a detective would not trace him by that. But, hang it, man! there must be some risk. Could you have contrived the scheme better?"

"No, that I could not," said Pannell, giving his whip a whisk through the air.

"Then leave it alone, my dear boy, and think of the coin. It would not be a hanging matter if we were found out. Drive on a little faster."

The horse received a cut, and increased his rate, and the night slowly wore away.

Once now and then Sheldrake descended and entered the fly to inspect the state of the prisoner, whose teeth were forced open and a lozenge inserted; but he gave no trouble whatever, and the journey was continued over hill after hill of a wild, bleak-looking countryside, the course followed being taken so unhesitatingly that it was evident the party had well studied their road.

From time to time a policeman was met, but the quiet respectability of the turn-out, and silver band on the driver's hat, were

sufficient to lull all suspicion; and the fly rolled on with its insensible burden.

Sheldrake had made his calculations so well that the clocks were striking eight as the fly was driven along the main street of the busy manufacturing town, and soon after a halt was made at the door of one of the principal inns.

Here, after a short colloquy with the landlord, Range was carefully lifted out and carried to a bedroom; the fly was driven into the yard, breakfast ordered in the sitting-room attached to the chamber, and the landlord himself superintended the preparation of the meal.

"I wouldn't have hesitated a moment, gentlemen," he said, "only sickness is so serious in a house like mine. If people thought there was anything ketching—fever, or that sort of thing—it would be ruin."

"Of course it would, landlord," said Sheldrake, blandly.

"And the poor gentleman's complaint is not likely to turn that way like, sir?"

"I put it to you, landlord," said Sheldrake, "and my friend, Dr. Parkins, shall give you his opinion, if you like."

"I'm much obliged, I'm sure, sir," said the landlord, who was still a little nervous.

"Five years in Jamaica, and being a little too free with the brandy, has done all this. Now, what do you think?"

"Oh! if that's it, sir, why of course. I see, sir; I see," said the landlord, cheerily, for any ailment produced by too much drink seemed to be perfectly natural, and nothing to mind. "Going on to-day, sir?"

"By the 2.25. We'll leave the fly here. You'll take great care of the horse?"

"As much as if it was my own, sir. You may depend upon me."

All ran its course as Sheldrake had arranged. A fly bore the sick man to the station, where he was tenderly placed under the doctor's superintendence in a first-class compartment, one being selected that had no divisions to the seats. This carriage was placed ready by a very sympathetic stationmaster, who did not scorn a tip, attached to the fast train, and Sheldrake and Mewburn smoked cigars all the way up, the driver looking rather ill-used at having to seek a seat in a second-class carriage.

At the terminus, Range, supported by two of his companions, walked from the main station to the underground in a mechanical way; and there they were joined by Jack Pannell, whose drab overcoat and livery hat had been deposited in the cloak-room, from which a hat-box was released, and who now appeared with his beard in full flow, and wearing a soft felt hat.

Here they secured another compartment, and, in the course of their journey, a marked change took place in Sheldrake, the change being effected by means of a clerical white cravat, and the buttoning of a cassock-like vest across his broad chest.

A little buttoning up, too, altered Mewburn's aspect. He took a

tall hat out of the box that had been released from the cloak-room, and from within this a soft clerical felt. This Sheldrake took in place of his own, which went into the box.

Between two more stations a change was effected in Range by means of a sponge, and some water poured from a flask into the cup. It was a hasty and cribbed style of ablution, but it was sufficient to render Range's face white once more, a close sealskin travelling-cap further disguising him, so that, but for his dazed, drowsy look, he in nowise resembled the invalid brought up from Rotherham by the fast train that day.

"Well," said Sheldrake, at last, "they may be too many for us, but they'll be clever if they run us down. I don't think we've anything to fear from outside, but——"

"Well, go on," said Mewburn, for his companion had stopped. "What do you mean by 'but'?"

"I mean, if we are bowled out it will be from inside."

"Inside?"

"Yes, by our friend here, or some weakness of our own."

"But we shall be so careful. We must be so careful," said Mewburn, rubbing his hands. "It has been so tremendous an expense that we must succeed or it will be ruin."

"Well, you needn't look at me like that," said John Pannell; "I'm not going to upset the affair. I know my part by heart."

"Then don't forget it, Jack," said Sheldrake, quietly; "and, above all, be careful about names. Doctor Nathan Parkins, your obedient servant," he said, with a bow to Mewburn.

"Yours, my reverend friend," said the other, with a mock obeisance.

"We ought to have some cards printed."

"Yes," said Sheldrake, smiling, and taking out his pocket-book.

"I thought so too. Here you are!"

"What! have you had them done?" said Mewburn.

"Of course. I think of all these things," said Sheldrake, coolly, as he handed a small packet to each of his companions, and showed his own card, on which appeared "Reverend Frank Range."

Pannell read aloud—

"Mr. John Range."

"Nathan Parkins, M.D.," read Mewburn. "I say," he added, "I'm in doubt about you two calling yourselves Range."

"I'm not," said Sheldrake. "Sooner or later our friend here will get speech with some one and say his name is Range. Well, that will endorse our story that he is our brother gone in the head."

"My dear Shell, what a man you are!" cried Mewburn, holding out his hand.

"But look here," said Pannell, "it was foolish to give our own Christian names. I don't think that's right."

"Don't you?" said Sheldrake. "I do. We must not bowl ourselves out. We must be open and free with everybody to disarm suspicion, and we should be certain to call each other by our Christian names sooner or later. I did it for safety."

"Here, I came in," said Pannell, holding out his hand. "Shell, you are——"

"Frank."

"Well, there, Frank, you have a head."

"Northall!" came from the platform, as the train stopped and the party descended, Range being lifted out by Pannell, who was tremendously strong when he liked to exert himself.

There was a fly at the door, and after a drive of about a mile the horse was checked at a great iron gate in a high wall, over which, dimly seen in the starlight, large trees hung their branches.

The sound of wheels had brought a servant-girl to the gate, which was unlocked, and the prisoner borne in by Pannell and Mewburn, while Sheldrake paid the man his fare, with a shilling over, as he said, for being civil.

Then Sheldrake entered, and the servant-girl closed and locked the gate, while the driver slowly mounted his seat and drove off.

"I thought as much," he said. "I was as sure as could be that if the Red House was taken it would be for the old game. Just like in a market, the butchers all get together, and here's this place made one big 'sylum with mad-houses all round. Poor beggars! some of 'em arn't so mad as they seem, and I wish 'em well out of the mess."

Meanwhile, Range had been half carried along a broad gravel-walk between fine old clustering shrubs to a flight of steps, at the top of which was an open door leading into a spacious hall, where, with the light of the shaded lamp shining upon her eager face, stood Sarah Pannell.

"You have him?" she whispered.

"Yes," said Mewburn, quickly; "open that door."

Sarah Pannell threw open the door of a spacious dining-room, and Range was carried in and thrown upon an old-fashioned sofa.

"Let him lie there till the girl's gone to bed," said Mewburn, panting. "Phew! he's heavy."

Just then the sound of the front door being closed and barred could be heard, followed by the rattling of a chain and the shooting of bolts, for it was past eleven. They were ominous sounds, suggestive of a prison for the man who lay in a heavy stupor upon the couch.

Sheldrake entered the room and closed the door.

"Now then," he said, "give me some brandy; I'm tired out. Well, fair Sarah, contemplating our golden idol, eh?"

The woman did not answer. She did not seem to hear his words, but stood there, full in the light of the table-lamp, gazing down at Range; and if ever face bore the imprint of malicious hate, mingled with desire for revenge, it was hers, as she said softly to herself—

"At last! And I made myself foolish for such a miserable wretch as that!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

WHEN Arthur Range opened his eyes and began to look about him he found himself lying upon a strangely-made French bedstead in a plainly furnished, spacious bedroom; but, beyond looking vacantly round and noting this, he troubled himself no more. For his head ached frightfully, and he suffered from a peculiar nausea that robbed him of all desire to move.

He closed his eyes, not to sleep, but to lie perfectly still with a singing noise in his ears that rose and fell. Sometimes it was like the faint, strange whisper heard when a shell is held against the ear, then it would increase till it seemed as if hundreds of tiny bells were ringing afar off, and then it would become a dull roar and pass away.

After a time the throbbing in his head became easier and his brain less benumbed. In a dreamy, indifferent way he now unclosed his eyes, and once more they travelled about the room to note a faint buzzing in one corner, and the agitation going on in a film of net close to the ceiling near his bed.

That must have been the singing noise he recalled, for he was beginning to think now, and put this and that together.

It was quite interesting—a large purple fly had been caught in the web of a spider, and it was struggling hard to get away; but in vain, for the busy spider had its legs at work, and was twisting its prisoner over and over in the web, till thread after thread bound down wings, legs, and the segments of its body, and it was completely at the cunning insect's mercy.

Range gazed at this in an abstracted manner for some time, and then his eyes wandered away to where the sun shone in through a couple of windows whose blinds had been drawn up nearly to the top.

There were ivy-leaves all about those windows, like a frame, and the leaves that hung down quivered in the breeze.

At another time he would not have noticed those ivy-leaves, but now they interested him, and it was curious to see that two long strands of the summer growth, with smaller, delicately-formed leaves, had thrust themselves out from the rest, and were hanging half across the panes at the top.

That seemed enough for the present, for his head began to throb, and he lay with his eyes closed again; but after a time they were opened, and his gaze went straight back to those two strands of ivy, one of which, agitated by the breeze, kept up a gentle tapping upon one sheet of glass.

Those seemed to be strong, old-fashioned windows with rather small panes; and once upon a time this must have been a nursery, for there were stout iron bars from top to bottom to keep the children from falling out.

"Children will climb," thought Range; and then the sensation of nausea came back, and as he closed his eyes again it seemed to him that he was a child once more, and that he had been ill. For he remembered lying sick in just such a nursery as this.

No: he was not a child, and the sick sensation had passed off. His eyes were clearer too, and he let them wander about over the walls at the faded flower-patterned paper, the tall painted clothes-press, and then at an oval hand-glass, new and bright-looking. There was a picture or two hanging upon the wall—old-fashioned prints they were of the Queen and Prince Albert, and there was another over the washstand—of the great Duke of Wellington with apparently a ghastly sabre-cut across his temple and famous nose down athwart his cheek to the corner of his mouth. But it was not a gash, only a crack in the glass, and it struck Range that if that picture were not seen to it would soon be down, for the nail was nearly out of the plaster wall. The paper about it, too, was torn, and a little of the white plaster had crumbled out, lying on the torn paper and on the top of the frame by the ring.

All trifles these, which he afterwards recalled, wondering that they should have interested him so much, instead of that question that might have been supposed to strike him first—How came he there?

At last, through the soft mist that seemed to have dulled and deposited a thick dew of forgetfulness over his memory and intellect, the thought came very slowly to him that he would be easier if he changed his position.

It took some time, in his prostrate state, for that thought to come right home. At first it made his head ache, and he closed his eyes and left it for a time; but at last it asserted itself again, and, in obedience, he tried to turn on one side.

That act roused him, and he was thoroughly awakened at last from his drugged sleep, for in an instant he now realised that he was fastened down to the bed.

He lay panting—not from the effort, but from the strange effect this knowledge had upon him. His eyes dilated, the perspiration gathered in great drops about his temples, and his eyes were involuntarily directed towards the spider's web and the prisoner he could see there, with the great insect hard at work sucking away at the juices contained in the body of the luckless fly.

"A prisoner!" he ejaculated, and as if it were magnetic he stared at that spider's web with the recollection of certain words that he had heard in one of the arbours at Salzbingen coming back with a rapidity and force that seemed to stun him, till, making an effort over himself, he exclaimed—

"Absurd! I must have been ill."

"Yes, that's it," he added after a moment or two's pause. "I have been very ill—some fever, I suppose. Let's see, what do I remember last?"

His head was momentarily growing clearer, and he lay perfectly

still, forcing down the strong desire he felt to struggle and call out for help.

"I've been very ill and delirious, I suppose," he said to himself after an effort in which he proved his possession of wonderful force of will and stubborn determination. "Now let's see, what can I recollect about being ill?"

He lay still, gazing out of the ivy-framed windows, and then drew a long breath.

"Nothing," he said at last, "nothing whatever. It is all a blank. I must have been very bad."

He was quiescent for awhile, and then he went on musing aloud.

"It must have been that scene with Ju——with Miss Nesbitt threw me off my balance. I wonder how long it is ago! I've read of love, and I've heard of fellows shooting and poisoning themselves for it, but I didn't know it could be so bad as this. Affects a fellow with a sort of brain fever, I suppose. I ought to be quiet and not worry myself, but I don't feel bad now, only better and better. My head doesn't ache, and I'm—surely this sinking feeling can't be hunger? Pooh! Absurd! I'm very weak and ill of course. Someone will be here soon—the nurse, or perhaps Sir Harry will come and have a look at me. They've put me up in this room because it's cool and quiet, I suppose. Ah! I was a lucky fellow to be taken ill in such good quarters."

Then he lay thinking and listening to the sparrows which came and sat upon his window-sill, chirping loudly. Would Judith be sorry that he was so bad? Not likely. It was all a bit of madness on his part, and he ought to have known better. So sweet a lady was not likely to be impressed by so rough and uncultivated a fellow as he.

"And I'm glad of it after all," he said. "And I love her more than ever. She's all I ever thought her to be—a sweet, honest, true-hearted English lady, who scorned to accept me just because I was immensely rich."

Then he thought about his last interview with her, and his walk afterwards in the woodland road.

"Put a stop to my leaving," he said; and a feeling of latent hope began to dawn that perhaps, after all, Judith might relent. He was thinking this when, like a flash, he remembered meeting the two strangers.

"I'd forgotten that," he said, half aloud; "why——"

He stopped short to try and think it out; but he could recall nothing but walking with them to put them in the right direction. After that all was blank.

"It must have been coming on then," he said to himself. "I was getting bad; and I must have been taken ill in the night."

Just then there was the faint sound of a key in a lock, and a bolt was shot back; there were steps in a passage, voices speaking, and sounding distant and muffled; then another key in a lock, the shooting back of a fresh bolt, and a closely-fitting door was opened,

for steps and voices suddenly became very plain. Then a key was inserted in his own door, and with lightning-like rapidity Range realised, as he tried once more to move, that two straps were across his loins and knees, tightly holding him down, that he was in a strait-waistcoat whose long sleeves were tied to the sides of the bedstead, and as his eyes once more, as if in opposition to his will, sought the spider's web and the helpless fly, he began to realise that this was his case, and his position was dawning upon him with overwhelming force.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CLEARING THE MIST.

FROM the spider's web Range's eyes sought the door once more—a plain, stoutly-made door, with large panels at the bottom, two lesser in the middle, and a couple quite small at the top.

Suddenly this door was thrown open, and Range saw two men stride in—two men whom he seemed to have met before, and yet they were strangers. One was a bluff, manly-looking clergyman, in silken cassock vest, and narrow, plain band, white cravat; the other, a thinner, smaller, eager-looking man, in spotless black, with large gold fob chain, and seals, quite of the old-fashioned type; and they came straight up to his bedside with inquiring looks.

There was something about them that reminded Range of the two men he had met in the woodland road; but they were so different now, and he was in doubt when the clergyman spoke.

"My dear Arthur, you are better now?"

Before Range could reply the man in black had bent over him, and then raised himself up with a satisfied nod.

"Yes," he said, "better—decidedly better. He has taken a change."

In spite of himself Range felt his blood seem to run cold and away back to his heart, for he recognised both these voices; they were the same that he had heard in the harbour at Salzbingen; and there was something horribly prophetic, as in the guise of warning, in that spider's web in the corner. For every word that had been uttered that night was deep in his memory. That smooth-spoken, clerical-looking man had, then, made his plans, and so far they had been successful. He was in his power, locked up in this house.

Of course, he saw it all now; these were the two whom he had met in the wood, and they had assumed that nasal twang. Once he recalled that their voices had seemed familiar, but it had made no impression.

That cigar! Yes: he saw it all now. Well, they had taken this trick, but they had not won anything yet. Perhaps he could be as stubborn and obstinate as the leader of the gang. They should see.

He did not speak, and they stood smiling down at him in a quiet, pleasant way that did not conceal their triumph; while as Range

looked firmly back at them he made up his mind as to his course of action.

He was completely in their power, and he was man of the world enough, accustomed to danger, to know that cries for help, appeals, and threats would be so much waste of breath. It was a piece of gambling with men who were determined, for they were playing for tremendous stakes, and they had declared in his hearing that they meant to win.

Well, he was determined that they should not, and he was going to try and bring his skill to bear against theirs, his cunning against all they could show. It was to be "double cunning," he said, for the devil must be fought with his own weapons.

"Are you in any pain now, my dear Arthur?" said the clergyman, quietly, and in a voice full of interest.

"Order up some breakfast for me directly," said Range, coolly.

The two men exchanged glances, and the lesser took his cue from the other's look.

"Decidedly a change for the better," he said. "I think, Mr. Range, he might have a little light refreshment; the healthy appetite is returning."

"Are you speaking to me?" said Range, sharply.

"My dear sir, no. To your brother here."

"Oh! that's my brother, is it?" said Range.

"Yes. Don't you know him—the Reverend Frank Range?"

"Oh! the Reverend Frank Range, eh? Is that the last *alias*?"

"A little wrong still, doctor," whispered the clergyman, sighing.

"A trifle, my dear sir, a trifle," was the reply. "We cannot expect this to be otherwise than a tedious case. We must be patient—patient!"

"Are you going to keep me tied down here like this?" said Range.

"Only for the present, my dear sir; only for the present. Your good brother is exceedingly anxious that you should be at liberty; but it will be better, I think, for a time, that you should lie perfectly still as you are."

"Is Jack Pannell here?" said Range, sharply; and his homethrust startled the pair, who again exchanged glances.

"My dear Arthur, yes. Our brother John is here; but why do you call him Pannell?"

"Look here," said Range, bluntly, "you spoke of me as an idiot, the other night—you did, Mr. Frank Sheldrake. You see I know your name, and I know your plans. Yes, Mr. Nathan Mewburn, I know your plans, so you had better drop all this foolery. I suppose it is part of the scheme. It's clever, though, as clever as the contrivance by which you trapped me in that wood."

"What does he mean?" said Range's visitors, in a breath.

"There, let it go," said Range, angrily. "You see, I'm not such an idiot as not to see through all this. Perhaps I'm not wise in letting you see how much I know of your plans; perhaps I am. At all events, it will simplify matters if we are plain with one another."

"To be sure, yes, to be sure," said Mewburn, rubbing his hands.

"My dear doctor, is that wise?" said Sheldrake. "Had you not better give my poor brother some quieting draught?"

"Hang your quieting draught, you scoundrel!" roared Range, furiously. "Let me have some breakfast. I can pay for it, I suppose, unless you have taken all I had in my pockets."

"There, you see you are getting violent again, my dear brother," said Sheldrake. "You must be kept down till you have been depleted—that is the term, is it not, doctor?"

"Yes, yes," said Mewburn, with a cackling, harsh laugh, "depleted; yes, he must be bled."

"A man who has lost all governance of himself," continued Sheldrake; "who nearly killed the beautiful girl, Judith Nesbitt, whom he wanted to marry."

"You dog!" said Range, grinding his teeth. "So that is it, is it? You are my brother, and this is the doctor, and you are keeping me here in restraint, eh? Is John Pannell here, I say?"

"Your brother John is here, poor fellow, with his wife," continued Sheldrake, with a bland smile.

"Well, it's a clever bit of business," said Range, quietly. "Give me some breakfast, and undo these things."

"No, my dear friend, no," said Mewburn, gently; "not yet, not yet. Wait a little, and we shall see."

"Where have you brought me?" said Range, suddenly.

"Doctor," said Sheldrake, smiling, "you really must give him a sedative. The poor fellow is wandering again. He wants to see your cards and mine. Now is it likely a sane man would ask such a thing? There, we'll send him some breakfast. He'll soon come round, eh?"

"Yes, decidedly, decidedly," said Mewburn; and he rose to walk towards the door.

"Look here," said Range, "are you going to unfasten these things?"

"Not to-day, my dear sir, not to-day. Have a little patience; get a little better, and you shall be quite free."

Range glanced from one to the other, but did not speak; and Sheldrake, after passing his finger round the inside of his stiff-edged cravat as if it were rather irksome to him, and smoothing down his silk vest, seemed to be thinking.

"Where's my watch?" said Range, suddenly.

"Taken care of, my dear boy, and your pocket-book as well," said Sheldrake. "Don't be uneasy about them. We are not men who deal in trifles."

He accompanied this with a meaning look, and Range frowned and drew a hard breath.

But he knew it was of no avail to struggle or call for help. He felt that, if he was to checkmate these men, it must be, as he had before thought, by meeting cunning with cunning, and he lay

perfectly still, while, making a sign to Mewburn, Sheldrake led the way out of the room.

They closed and locked the door, and as soon as he was alone a convulsive spasm ran through Range; his face grew distorted and purple with the blood that flushed to his temples, and he shook the bed with the insane effort he made to get free.

The struggle only lasted a few moments.

It was the animal usurping sway over the mental power of the man.

Then reason took the reins once more, and he lay perfectly still, with his face resuming its former tint, only his nether lip quivering with emotion.

"Hah!" he ejaculated, "that won't do. I must be cool. Things might have been worse. It is only a fight for my money. It might have been that they had dragged me off just when I was happy with Judith. As it is, I am better here. I was going away. If I had been happy with her, all this would have driven me mad."

The strongbedstead gave a loud crack as Range started again, his last word having frightened him by its terrible import, as he realised by the stillness that this was some out-of-the-way house, far from help.

"Why," he exclaimed, "they will pretend that I am mad!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ANOTHER LADY ON THE SCENE.

RANGE lay panting for some few minutes, mastering himself, and at last growing quite cool.

"Let them pretend," he said; "they shall find that they will not drive me mad. Here they come again."

There were the footsteps once more; the door was unlocked, and Sheldrake held it open as Mewburn, big John Pannell, who seemed a perfect Goliath by his side, and a stupid-looking, very slatternly maid, entered the room.

The girl was of the bun-faced, fleshy-nosed type, with small round, wondering eyes, and a weak mouth, with weak springs at the angles of the jaws which never held it closely shut. It is impossible, of course, to say what bonds she placed upon her figure; but, be they what they might, they had no effect in producing graceful curves, for she was exceedingly straight up and down, and her washed-out print dress did not set her off to the best advantage.

Some one has said that a woman cannot be wholly plain: she is sure to have one redeeming feature.

It was so here, for Jane possessed a crop of magnificent wavy-brown hair, that would have been a glory if well kept.

But it was not well kept, being roughly looped on one side much lower than upon the other. Over and upon her forehead there was the fuzz of little natural curls that a fashionable lady strives vainly to imitate, and wagging and banging about her nape and shoulders a loosely twisted-up knot that was in the habit of coming down and

hanging nearly to her feet, while perched over all, very much awry, and held on by a single hair-pin, was a dirty scrap of lace.

Jane's aspect is described in detail for special reasons, as she stood holding, with her arms outspread, and its edge pressing very hard against her chest, a large wooden lunch tray covered with a fair Rhite napkin; and, as she stood staring with wide-open eyes at wange, his attention was divided between her absurdly comical face and aspect and the fairly plentiful breakfast she bore.

"That will do, Jane," said Sheldrake, gently; "put the tray upon this table, there's a good girl. My brother is very little worse for his journey. Tha-a-ank you."

Jane bumped the tray down heavily upon the table, and then drew it forward, staring at Range the while, and he frowned at her involuntarily as he saw that his supposed character had been already spread, for the girl approached shrinkingly, and as soon as she had arranged the tray stepped quickly back.

"Brought everything, Jane—butter—salt—spoons? Yes: I see."

"Shall I have to wait for the tray, sir?" drawled the girl.

"Oh, dear, no, Jane," replied Sheldrake. "I dare say he will be some time over his breakfast. I will ring. Don't be afraid, Jane," he said, in a whisper loud enough for Range to hear, "he is very quiet. Only sometimes he is rather bad. Tha-a-ank you—that will do."

He backed the girl out of the room, waited till she had passed through a door at the end of a passage, and then closed a baize door and the inner one.

"How are you, old fellow?" said Pannell, giving his great beard a stroke down, and then with both hands spreading it over his breast like a fan.

"You're in this blackguard affair then, John Pannell?" said Range, in reply.

"Yes, I'm in it, old fellow."

"That will do, Jack Pannell Range," said Sheldrake, meaningly. "Now, look here, my dear Arthur, we are not going to starve you. We mean to feed you well, but you are our visitor, and you have to stay. We shall put up with no nonsense, for we are three to one, and your brother John here is as strong as two ordinary men. Now, you want your breakfast. If you will undertake to eat it quietly we will slip off that—that—well, that rather awkward nightgown, while you have your meal. Will you give your word?"

"We are on two sides," said Range. "Of course you know what I mean to do."

"Escape, of course—if you can. But we have taken all precautions against that. If you did we have only to speak and you would be brought back. Now then, is it *parole d'honneur*?"

"No!"

"Just as you like, my dear boy. Untie one sleeve, Jack, and let him do the best he can. Pooh! undo both, and let him sit up."

John Pannell, who had a large brown meerschaum pipe in one

hand, a great india-rubber tobacco pouch in the other, laid them down on the mantel-piece, and in a calm, serious manner unfastened first one sleeve and then the other of the strait-waistcoat, when, unable for the moment to resist the temptation, Range sprang up, but only to awake to the fact that he had a strong strap about his waist, and that it also was fastened to the side of the bedstead.

"Why, you look like a Pierrot at one of the carnivals on the Riviera, Range, old fellow," said Pannell, chuckling. "It is not a becoming dress."

Range felt a shudder run through him as he glanced down at the strong linen sleeves continued far beyond his hands, so that they could be tied to the sides of the bed, and a strong feeling of indignation made him ready to utter a protest; but he felt more than ever that he must be calm.

"Here," said Pannell, "slip your hand through that slit. That's the way," and he took out a knife, made a slit in the material, and held the sleeve while Range forced his fingers through.

"That's better," said Sheldrake, smiling, as he lifted the tray and placed it across Range's knees. "Now, my dear Arthur, you can go on with your breakfast while we talk to you. Jack can light his pipe: you will not mind, I'm sure."

Range felt that he should require all his self-control, and that food would help him by affording him strength, so, in a calm, matter-of-fact manner, he went on pouring out coffee and eating bread and fried bacon with a fairly good appetite.

Sheldrake and Mewburn took chairs on either side of the bed, and Pannell seated himself on the broad window-sill, pulled up the sash, and proceeded to fill and light his pipe and emit great puffs of smoke.

"Coffee all right?" said Sheldrake, smiling.

Range glanced at him and nodded.

"Well, now then, suppose we have a pleasant little chat," continued Sheldrake. "I presume you know why you are here?"

Range nodded.

"Ah! that's right, saves a lot of explanation," said Sheldrake. "We will not bother you now; but as soon as you are disposed to treat, and to amply make up to your two brothers here and your dear old friend the doctor for the unfair way in which you have inherited so much, we will settle it all easily with you, and you can go."

"Thank you!" said Range, refilling his coffee-cup.

"Just to make you comfortable, and to let you see that it would be folly for you to rely upon any broken-reedy hopes of getting help from outside, I may as well tell you who and what you are."

"Your brother, to begin with," said Range, coolly.

"Exactly. An unfortunate brother for whom we are obliged to keep a private medical attendant—Doctor Parkins here."

He nodded towards Mewburn and smiled.

"We have taken this old-fashioned house, which was once a private asylum for a couple of old gentlemen, which makes it the more convenient and suitable for our purpose. It is retired, surrounded by

a high brick wall, and has its own particular character. In your name, you understand?"

Range nodded.

"Yours is a peculiar case that we hope to cure in time—an unhappy attachment for a young lady."

Range winced slightly, and a flash of triumph darted from Sheldrake's eyes.

"This young lady refused you, for you professed to her that you were immensely rich."

Range's brow contracted, and he ceased eating.

"This idea of being immensely rich, my dear brother Arthur, is the form your mania has assumed, and we shall take care that this is well known, lest you should be attempting to tamper with servants or people outside with absurd promises of enormous rewards if they help you to escape."

The ingenuity of the idea made Range wince again.

"That will all fit with the relation of your story that you are confined here by scoundrels who are trying to get your money away. Do you see? When you speak to people—if you ever get a chance—it will be such a thorough madman's tale that you are enormously wealthy, and ready to give any amount away if you are freed from the men who have kidnapped you and shut you up. There, I thought it just as well to make you *au courant* with your position, my dear boy. Meantime, till some good substantial proposal comes from you, this pleasant healthy place is your home, and you will dwell in peace and security here with your brother the clergyman; your brother the athlete, who is fond of gardening; his fair wife; and our good friend here, Doctor Parkins, who will make notes of your case day by day."

"A clever, daring plan, Mr. Sheldrake."

"Reverend Frank Range, at your service, brother."

"And boldly conceived and carried out," said Range, coolly.

"You deserve a few dollars for your ingenuity, but you will not get them out of me."

"Not to-day, perhaps," said Sheldrake, smiling. "We are in no hurry. You can begin to treat when it suits you. Take your time, my dear fellow! Above all things, try and get well as soon as you possibly can. Will you have any more breakfast?"

For answer Range thrust away the tray.

"I think we all understand our positions," continued Sheldrake, looking round.

Pannell nodded, and sent a large puff of smoke towards the ceiling.

"We can let the poor beggar have a pipe," he said, quietly.

"Pipe, cigars, wine,—everything he likes to ask for, eh, doctor?—except liberty."

"Certainly," replied Mewburn, with an unpleasant grin; "and I shall, you may depend, spare no pains in bringing my dear patient quite to his proper senses."

"To be sure you will, doctor, and, I am sure, before long. Meals

shall be supplied at proper hours. His digestion need not be studied, eh, doctor?"

"Oh, dear no!"

"We wouldn't bother him early this morning after his journey."

"Then it was last night," thought Range.

"And now he would, I am sure, feel better for being alone, eh, doctor?"

"Yes. Quiet is indispensable."

"Then, my dear Jack, will you kindly—— I'll lift away the tray."

Sheldrake removed the breakfast things to the table, while, laying down his pipe, Pannell approached the bed and laid his broad hand upon Range's chest.

"Now, colonel," he said, "lie down!"

Range's eyes flashed with resentment. They were going to bind him again, he thought, and thrusting the hand away he forgot all his mental plans of waiting and meeting trick with trick.

It was a vain effort; secured as he was by the strap about his waist and those over his legs, he was comparatively helpless, and Pannell had an easy victory as he threw himself forward, driving Range back and lying across his chest.

"Tie those sleeves!" said the great fellow, gruffly; and it was done—Range, the next minute, being as helpless as a babe.

"A little excitable, doctor," said Sheldrake, finishing the tying on his side.

"Yes, but he'll soon come round," said Mewburn, finishing his side tightly.

"No use to kick, colonel," said Pannell, rising slowly. "We're too many for you now."

Five minutes after, the slatternly maid came in obedience to a summons and fetched the tray, staring round-eyed and open-mouthed at Range.

Then his visitors left him, and he was alone with the iron-barred windows, the ivy strands, the spider, and his thoughts.

"Where am I?" said Range to himself. "In what part of the country? I must be close to Sir Harry's. If I could only let him know!"

"The clever scoundrels! But, clever as they are, I'll be too much for them, in spite of their plans."

Then he recalled the fact that John Pannell's wife was in the same house with him, and he remembered her threats.

"Pish!" he muttered, after a little thinking. "She is a woman, and, after the first burst of anger, will be ready to help me out of this scrape."

"I don't know though," he added. "She is one of the gang, and she is not Pannell's sister, or I might be able to deal with her."

He lay there for about an hour thinking, and at times hardly able to realise the truth of his position. The place was wonderfully still; and when there was a sound in the house it seemed so strange and far off that he felt that the place must be large.

Three times over there was a strange rushing and rumbling noise that puzzled him, till he realised that it was a train, and this set him thinking again as to where he could be. Sir Harry's place was seven miles from the nearest railway, and so he must be at least that distance from his friends.

"Well," he said at last, "here I am—a regular prisoner, just as they used to make them in the good old times, and I suppose I'm held to ransom; but if they reckon upon getting it I'm afraid they will be disappointed. Now then—how to get away. Let me see. I've been in worse fixes than this with Uncle Wash, so *nil des*. I'm going to get away from here. Hallo!"

His musings and plannings were interrupted by a curious knocking noise against the wainscot or skirting-board of the next room, and after listening to it for a few minutes he was puzzled.

"There must be a fellow-prisoner there," he thought, and he wondered all the while at the cool manner in which he seemed to be taking his position. "The wall must be quite thin—panelled, I suppose. Is it meant for signals? Pooh! how absurd! Why, it's somebody sweeping the room!"

Just then a pleasant musical voice burst out in a quaint West-country ditty on the old, old theme; and Range lay listening to the words and the thumps given by the broom against the skirting-board.

"Here! hi! hallo!" he cried at last, and song and sweeping came to an end at once.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LADY FANSHAW'S THREAT.

CARLEIGH grew calmer as the days went by, but to his annoyance he found that Alice avoided him. Try how he would he could not obtain an interview, for she was pitifully weak and ill, and Sir Harry was constant in his attendance upon her.

For some days she did not leave her room, and all that time Carleigh was in agony lest, in a fit of remorse, she should confess.

"If I could get at her I would strengthen her with a few words," he thought; but he dared not write, though a dozen times over he went into the library for the purpose, and by an odd coincidence, when he did so, Sir Harry was there, and more fatherly and affectionate than ever.

He turned to Judith for a resource, forcing himself to forget the haunting dread of discovery that always tortured him; but Judith obstinately refused to be *tête-à-tête* with him so pointedly that his brow grew damp, and he asked himself whether she could suspect anything that she shrank from him as she did.

"Suspicion of my own," he said, as he saw Judith go to her uncle's side and sit and read to him, devoting herself to him as constantly as Sir Harry did his time to Lady Fanshaw.

A dozen times over Carleigh determined to go abroad, and he even went so far as to begin packing; but no: he dare not.

"She could not be trusted," he said, wiping his face; "I must stay and watch her. My presence will act as a seal to her lips. Weak woman is very weak when there is no one by to guide."

It was getting rapidly on towards the first of September, and Sir Harry was eagerly looking forward to the day on his ward's account. Partridges formed the subject of conversation in the billiard-room, with Sam Burton summoned and questioned as to the prospects of sport; and as the days glided by Carleigh grew more at ease.

He was ready to start nervously when one evening, over the wine, Sir Robert said it was rather strange that Range had never written, and Sir Harry replied, haughtily, that Mr. Range could please himself.

That night Lady Fanshaw had been down to dinner, looking pale and statuesque. She too had started when Carleigh had spoken to her gently and in sympathetic tones, while, when he at last found an opportunity in the drawing-room, he said, softly—

"You are better now, I am glad to see. It was a great shock to your nerves, but you must try and forget it. Let me see you to-morrow."

He left her directly, for he saw that Judith's eyes were fixed upon him: but he did not fail to notice Lady Fanshaw's look of horror, and he strolled out into the garden to grow calm.

He waited about the next morning, declining Sir Harry's invitation to ride out with him and Sir Robert, thinking that Alice would be sure to take advantage of the opportunity, and be out in the grounds.

To his great delight, when the horses came round, he saw a third with a side-saddle.

For a few minutes he felt in doubt lest it might be for Lady Fanshaw, but, on crossing the hall, he saw Judith coming down, looking very charming in her riding-habit and soft felt hat, though the bright, merry air seemed to have passed away, and she had grown serious of mien.

This seemed suspicious to Carleigh, in his peculiar frame of mind; so did her coldness of manner; but he assumed an easy-going lightness of speech as he chatted to her till Sir Harry and Sir Robert came from the library.

"What a fellow you are, George!" said Sir Harry, aside, to his ward. "Why don't you get a horse and come? We shall take the Brackley road, and we'll go slowly till you overtake us. You are neglecting Judy horribly."

"Not this morning," replied Carleigh. "I'm a bit feverish. A little touch of what I caught at the Cape."

"There! I said so to my brother. Let me ask Murray to come and see you."

"Nonsense! Oh, no! I shall be all right to-morrow. I am better to-day, and if I get doctoring I shall be stopped for the First. No, no! I shall just rest, and it will go off."

"But, my dear boy, you have been out of sorts ever since Range left us so suddenly. That night, you know. I saw the change in you next morning."

"Oh! it's a mere nothing," said Carleigh, forcing a smile. "I shall be better. I am better. I won't doctor now."

"You feel like getting over it, my dear boy?"

"Oh, yes!—much better."

"And you promise me that if you are not right in a day or two you will have advice?"

"Certainly. There, the thought of having the doctor has made me feel better already. Ah! you might have let me do that, Sir Robert."

"You are always behind with her, George," said Sir Harry, reproachfully, as his attention was called by the captain's words to Judith being helped into the saddle.

Carleigh's eyes flashed with satisfaction as he saw the party ride off; and, as soon as they had passed out of sight, he went to the other side of the house and walked up and down on the lawn for a few times, humming loudly a few scraps of one of the duets he had been in the habit of singing with Alice, and then, in full view of her window, he walked gently down the garden, stopping here and there as if examining the flowers.

"She will come to-day," he said to himself, for a feeling of certainty inspired the words, and the feverish colour came into his cheeks as his thoughts ran upon the horror of their last meeting, though they were mingled with a kind of triumph as he felt that the tie that bound them now was too strong to be broken.

"She has more real courage than I gave her credit for," he thought. "She is not so weak a woman as I used to believe. So much the better; and when at last she leaves him in obedience to my will—for she is mine——"

He paused, for on the other side of the thick yew hedge that separated the lawn, where he was walking, from the flower-garden, he heard voices.

Only those of the Scotch gardener, Macpherson, and one of his men; but the words seemed to turn Carleigh to stone.

"I've never made out what become of that spade, Tom," said Macpherson.

"Ay, it be stränge," said the man addressed. "It weer hinging oop i' toolhaus, I'll tek my oath, for I putt it theer mysen."

Carleigh did not stop to hear more, but went away with his heart beating, and thinking of how often a murder had been discovered through some trivial thing of that kind.

"Curse the spade!" he said to himself; and as he walked about he determined to get a small, thin saw, one of those used by carpenters for cutting curves, and easily carried inside the coat. With this he could go some day and saw the handle off close to the block of stone that held it down.

"I could burn the handle then," he argued, "and then there will be no fear of its being found."

As it was, he felt that at any time Macpherson and his men might come upon it when making some alteration at Sir Harry's wish.

And how near they had been to finding it already he shuddered to think.

He sauntered here and there for quite a couple of hours, but there was no sign of Alice, and at last, unable to resist the attraction that drew him there, he took the path that led to the Wilderness, passed through the rustic gate, and was half way down towards the little landslip when he saw, just before him, seated upon a twig, that same large-eyed robin watching him intently.

He started violently as he saw the bird flit from its perch and go down by the bridge and settle, waiting, apparently, for him to join it.

"What a coward and idiot I am growing!" he said to himself. "I shall take to believing next in metempsychosis, and that that fellow's soul is in the bird."

He roused himself and went over the bridge, but altered his mind, and came back to go down the little fern-hung track by the water, following the tiny stream that flowed round the great block of stone and soil that he had brought down. These were already brightened by the shrubs and plants Sir Harry had ordered there, while just at the turn, in a sheltered corner, looking right up into the wood, he had had a rustic seat fixed in the niche of rock facing the slip.

Carleigh walked slowly on, watching the changes in the place, and feeling satisfied that there was not the slightest likelihood now of a discovery of the crime, when a slight rustle made him start, and he uttered an exclamation, half of wonder, half of joy, as he saw Alice shrinking back in a corner of the seat as if in the hope of his passing her unseen.

"At last!" he cried, hurrying to her side. "I knew that you would come."

"Don't touch me!" she cried, hoarsely; and her eyes were fixed upon him with a horror he could not misinterpret.

"Oh, nonsense! Alice—my own love!" he whispered, passionately; and he caught her hand in his.

It was but for a moment, and then she had snatched it away, and made a blow at him as she would have struck at some poisonous reptile.

"I say, don't touch me!" she cried again, hoarsely.

"How can you be so foolish?" he whispered, soothingly. "There, I am not angry. You have struck me. If a man had done that it might have caused his death."

"As it caused the death of the poor fellow who lies there," she cried.

"Hush!" he hissed. "Are you mad?"

"No," she said sternly: and as he gazed at her he thought she had never looked so beautiful before. "I was mad, but now I am sane."

"Alice! love!" he whispered, "be reasonable—be sensible. I could not help it. It was my life or his. It was that or utter destruction. You do not know—you do not think of what I suffer."

"You suffer!" she cried, scornfully. "What are your sufferings to mine?"

"Well, we both suffer in our love," he whispered, as he again tried to catch her hand in his, but without success.

"Our love!" she echoed. "Our hate!"

"You have struck me; now you are piercing me with your cruel words," he whispered. "I knew you would come, and now you must—you shall hear me."

"Come?" she said, "here? I chose this awful place, the scene of my crime and yours, because I felt that you would shun it."

"But my instinct told me that the woman I love would be here, and I came. Alice, darling, no more of this folly. We are alone. We can now decide upon our future. Listen to me—my own!"

"Our future!" she said bitterly. "I have decided upon mine."

"And you will leave here with me?"

"Answer me," she said. "Why have you not fled from this scene of my degradation—of your crime?"

"Fled? Without you!" he echoed.

"I'll tell you," she continued, ignoring his words. "You feared that I should, in my abject weakness, betray your terrible secret; that I should reveal it in some hysterical fit of terror."

"Well, yes," he said, smiling grimly. "I confess I did fear that, till I had seen you and strengthened you by what I meant to say."

"Have no fear!" she said coldly. "I was a weak, foolish girl then. I did not realise my life. Now I am a woman—a stern woman who can be trusted."

"And more beautiful than ever," he whispered. "Alice, I do trust you, as I love you more than I can say. Now listen."

"Now listen to me, cold, selfish, black-hearted traitor! I meant to meet you——"

"To call me cruel names like this. Well, I'll bear them," he said; "the reconciliation will be more sweet."

"—To meet you and tell you how I have awakened from my silly girlish liking for your base flatteries. I did not realise the precipice by whose side I walked till you declared yourself as you did—till you showed me the blackness of your vile heart. Now, I thank God, I see you in your true light as the would-be traitor—the traitor in heart to the man whose tender, chivalrous love for you has been that of a father."

"Oh, Alice! my darling!"

"Silence, wretch!" she cried. "Hear what I have to say. We cannot undo that sin—we cannot bring that poor fellow to life; but we can repent."

"Repent for slaying a miserable spy in self-defence?"

"Spy? A man who was ready to defend my honour for my husband's sake."

"Pish! These are heroics."

"Listen to me," she continued. "I go to my husband humbly, in the patient hope that a life of devotion may do something to atone

for my share in your crime. As for you—you will leave this place, never to enter it again."

"Yes," he said, "with you."

"With me? Man, I tell you that I would not have believed a woman could have had such loathing and hatred for one of God's creatures here on earth. You talk to me of love, of making me the companion of your flight—you, the cruel, remorseless wretch who could commit that crime and then go, calm and smiling, to Judith Nesbitt's side and talk to her of her lover's absence!"

"They say that walls have ears," he said, fiercely. "There may be other listeners among these trees. Do you wish me to do some other deed to prove my devotion—to save your good name?"

She shuddered.

"No," she said, bitterly. "I wish you to leave this place, to cease to torture me with the horror of your presence."

"Then you are afraid that I shall triumph. Alice, you love me."

"Love you!" she said, fiercely. "I love my husband, and I know it now—his generous, noble heart, him so brave and true!—and it is because I know that it would nearly kill him to find that the woman he has worshipped as an idol is the despicable, guilty wretch I am, that I refrain from telling him all. I would spare him, too, the knowledge that his adopted son is a man utterly devoid of honour, and a murderer."

"Mind what you are saying," he whispered fiercely.

"I know what I am saying, and I bid you make some excuse; change into a regiment on active service; go abroad and expiate your crime—or try to die as a brave man should."

"Will you go with me to some land where, in our love, we can forget these miseries?"

"Silence!" she cried, imperiously. "I bid you go."

"And if I refuse!"

"You dare not."

"I dare," he cried, angrily. "I utterly, unconditionally refuse."

"I have told you that your secret is safe with me."

"I tell you that, unless you consent to fly with me, I stay here till you do. You do not know your man, Alice. I have told you I love you—I have done this thing for your sake; and do you think that now I am willing to give up my reward?"

"You will go."

"I will not go!" he cried. "You do not know—how should a weak, ignorant woman know the strength of a man? You are mine, and I claim you as my right. You need not shrink now. I only tell you that you are mine, as I told you that night when I stood before you half drowned, half strangled in my fight for life. You are, I say, mine, and a bond exists between us stronger than any marriage vow. I tell you that you shall fly with me."

She made a scornful gesture.

"You are utterly helpless. I tell you that you are mine whenever I like to claim you as my own."

"And I tell you," she said, standing before him, now pale as ashes, but with her eyes contracted, and as firm as the rock that covered the dead man's bones—"I tell you that I am not so helpless as you think. Women, even in their weakness, can be strong. Now, George Carleigh, listen to me. Go, and I keep your secret; stay here, and approach that innocent girl with words of love, to murder her young life as you have murdered mine——"

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, gratingly; and there was the old ugly twitching of his handsome face. "Jealous, then!"

"Jealous?" she retorted. "You do not think me so weak. I say, approach her with your false love, or touch, or say one more such word to me again as you have said in the past, and take the consequences."

"The consequences? And what may they be?"

"The trial and punishment of your crime."

"Which you would share."

"Well," she said, smiling, "what then? Have I not earned them well?"

"What will you do then?" he said, laughing scornfully. "Send for the police, and say Captain Carleigh was attacked by a scoundrel, and in the struggle that ensued the wretched spy was slain?"

"I shall go to my dear, brave husband——"

"What sickly folly!"

"And lay bare the secret that is killing me."

"You dare not!"

"I will," she said, in a low, calm voice, as she crossed her hands upon her breast, and he read her determination in her eyes as she raised them towards heaven, and added, in a tone full of the solemn awe she felt for her oath—"I will, so help me God!"

She stepped towards him as she finished, and he involuntarily drew back to let her pass, and stood watching her till she was out of sight among the bushes, and he was alone.

"Curse her!" he exclaimed, at last. "Pooh! what folly, heroics! She has not recovered from the shock."

"What if I were to go?" he said. "To take her advice? Better than this life of misery and suspicion."

"No," he muttered, as he raised his eyes and saw the little robin watching him from a twig hard by. "There's a something here that seems to hold me. I could not go!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONVERSATION UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

RANGE listened for some moments, and all remained still.

"I've scared her away," he said. "I wonder whether it's the girl who brought the breakfast?"

He smiled, in spite of his troubles, as he recalled her appearance.

"Is any one there?" he said, after awhile.

"Yes, sir, I'm cleaning Mr. Frank Range's room," came faintly from the other side; and as far as the prisoner could tell it seemed

to him that some one was speaking with lips close to the panelled partition which had been papered over.

"Was it you that brought my breakfast?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"Look here, I want to ask you some questions," said Range.

"Oh, no, sir! please, I dursn't stop, sir. Mr. Range, sir, would be so angry if he knew."

"He does know, and he is not angry, my girl. I am Mr. Range."

"Oh, you are, are you, sir?"

"Yes; and look here, my girl, don't you be afraid, and you shall be well rewarded."

"Thankye, sir; but please, sir, are you—are you——"

"Am I what?" cried Range, turning up his eyes, and trying to stare over his head at the place whence the voice came behind his bed.

"Are you tied up tightly?"

"Yes, horribly."

"And you're sure you can't get away?"

"Yes, of course."

"That's a comfort," sighed the girl, who had seemed to shrink from the wall. "You aren't very mad just now, are you, sir?"

"Mad! no, of course not," cried Range, with an involuntary shiver. "What made you think I was?"

"Master and missus both said you was, sir."

"Well, never mind them: I'm not. Now listen to me, and answer me directly, there's a good girl. Where am I?"

"In the big top back room, sir, at the end of the passage."

"No, no!" said Range. "What house is this?"

"The Red House, sir. It's been empty ever so long, till master took it."

"Exactly; and where does it stand? What place is this?"

"Northall, sir."

"Northall? where's that?"

"I thought everybody know'd where Northall was, sir. Close by Hanleby, sir, where the mad people are."

"Why, we're close to London!" said Range in astonishment.

"Oh, no, sir, it's a long way—eight or nine miles, or more."

"Are we near to the road?"

"Oh, no, sir, we're down a lane like, and the road goes by the end."

Bang! bang! went the broom suddenly, and the girl began to hum over the tune again that she had been singing.

"There is some one coming," thought Range; and he found he was right, for a voice that he recognised said,

"You needn't go away, Jane. I'm not going to stop."

Range had of course but one main idea in his head at this time, and it was to escape. Everything here was to bend to that end, and so he lay perfectly still, listening and feeling that it might be of some use to make this girl his ally, and certainly wise to keep it a secret that he could so easily communicate with her through the partition.

That she was kindly disposed towards him she had shown by her

conversation, and that she looked upon his captors as her natural enemies she had also shown by the eager way in which she had resumed her work as soon as she heard the coming footsteps.

Range lay thinking over his position.

"It will be horrible to be kept a prisoner here," he thought. "More horrible to be beaten by a gang of swindlers. I'll stand out through it all; they shall not win."

His meal seemed to have had a wonderful effect upon him, giving strength of mind and body; and, as the latter was completely imprisoned, the former, which was free, became more active as he set to work planning some means of escape.

"It is only a matter of time," he said, after some consideration. "Sooner or later, if I keep on the watch, I must find a way out. They'll keep me bound and locked up, but they are certain some day to make a slip, and then is my opportunity."

He lay and listened to the distant rumble of a cart, which grew plainer and then died away. Then there was the rushing noise of a train, and, after that, silence, everything seeming wonderfully still.

This silence was broken at last by a noisy group of sparrows which settled upon the window-sill and kept up their lively chirping.

Somehow those sparrows interested him, and for the first time in his life he began to thoroughly understand how it was that prisoners of whom he had read came to make pets of mice and rats and spiders.

The window was open, and the pert little fellows set up their feathers and shook them, after partaking of a dust bath, and then plumed themselves, chirping pleasantly the while, their round dark eyes shining in the sun, which added a gloss to the chestnut and brown and grey of their feathers, till, as he watched them, he came to the conclusion that after all a sparrow unsullied by the London smoke was a very pretty bird.

"Better have been a sparrow," he said laughingly. "I don't know though; I dare say plenty of young cock-birds have their love troubles, and their Sheldrakes, Mewburns, and Pannells, in the shape of hawks, guns, and traps, and their fair Sarahs in the guise of cats. I don't suppose a bird's life is perfect."

Just then there was a loud fluttering of wings, the sparrows flew off, and all was still once more.

Range made a fresh examination of his room as far as his constrained position would allow, and noted everything, the simple furniture, the pictures again, the door and window, and his eyes rested long upon the bars.

"Well," he said at length, "men who have been kept in prisons have before now made their escape, why should not I?"

As if he expected that he might get away at once, he began to strain and drag at the strait-waistcoat to free his hands, and, after a good deal of trying, lay still, panting and hot, with a feeling akin to admiration of the ingenuity of the contrivance, which, while it was light and seemed to be frail as opposed to a strong man's muscles, was in effect as strong in its way as iron fetters.

So far he felt no horror at his situation. Despair had not been evoked, but lay deep down in the gloom of the caverns of his imagination. In fact, to Range in this stage of his imprisonment the whole affair wore something of the aspect of an outrageous practical joke of which he was the victim.

The other phases of impression were to come.

The day wore slowly on as he lay there stretched upon his back, feeling rather weary and cramped. He had had no lunch, but then breakfast had been very late, so he was not surprised; but it was getting well on towards evening, and in spite of his position he wanted dinner.

"It's their turn now," he thought, "and they have the best of the game; but my deal must come, and then——"

He had not made up his mind what was to happen then, and there was no hurry, so he lay and listened.

There was quite a pleasant breeze outside, and as he watched the quivering of the leaves an intense longing came over him to be out.

All at once a low whistling reached his ear, coming and going, and accompanying a heavy step on a gravel-walk.

The air was familiar, it was one he had often heard in the West, and after a time the whistling ceased, and snatches of the song of which it had been a rendering floated up, trolled in a big bass voice that he recognised as Pannell's.

"My big brother!" said Range with a scornful laugh. "Shall I hail him and say I'm hungry? No, I'm their prisoner, and they shall feed me as they please.

"Good heavens!" he ejaculated, after lying listening for another half-hour; "how ridiculous it is!"

Ridiculous? Yes, he felt it was ridiculous; but it was dawning upon him that all the same his position was very terrible, and that the simplicity of the precautions of these men in stamping him as out of his mind gave them tremendous power, and made him a prisoner with whom no one would care to interfere, or upon whose behalf be disposed to intercede.

"They have me fast," he said, after a long mental consideration of his position, "but I'm not made of the clay they think. If Judith had been different to me I'd have given half I possess to be free. Situated as I am they have made their *coup* at the wrong time. I'll hold out, let them do what they will, and I'm glad they've trapped me. It has given a nerve and strength to my future, and set me somehow to fight like a man, and fight I will if it's to the very death."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A QUIET CHAT.

AT last there was the sound of opening doors, the steps on the bare floor, and, preceded by his three gaolers, the girl bore in a tray, gazing in a scared way at Range, their eyes meeting for the moment before the tray was placed upon the table and the girl ushered out.

"How does he seem, doctor?" said Sheldrake, with a smile; and the fiction was kept up by Mewburn feeling the prisoner's pulse through the sleeve of the strait-waistcoat, and knitting his brows.

"Decidedly calmer," he said, after a pause. "Yes, certainly; I don't think a little refreshment will hurt him. John Range!"

Pannell came heavily to the bedside in obedience to a nod from Sheldrake, unfastened the sleeves of the strait-waistcoat, and Range sprang up, so thoroughly animal at heart now that he thought of nothing else but food.

The next moment, though, a horrible idea flashed through his brain.

"What a fearful lever starvation would be if they were to use that as a means of bending him to their will!"

He drove the thought away, for here was food now, and he wanted it badly.

The tray was placed before him, and the covers removed by Sheldrake, who said, mockingly—

"There, my dear brother, the doctor recommends a generous diet for you, and you shall be well fed until you can say with justice that you are only half as rich as you say that you are now."

Range could not help a slight start, for he grasped the scoundrel's meaning, but he was so faint from the excitement of his position that he gladly drank off the glass of claret poured out for him; and then, taking advantage of a second slit being made in the sleeves, he went on eating heartily of a tender, well-roasted chicken, with vegetables.

"Capital, doctor, capital!" cried Sheldrake, laughing. "What do you say, brother John? Is not Dr. Parkins wonderful?"

"Don't chaff the poor beggar!" said Pannell, gruffly. "Let him eat his meal in peace."

"Let him go on," said Range, coolly. "If it pleases him, let him enjoy himself. It does not worry me."

"Better and better," said Sheldrake, smiling. "You will not object to my smoking, Arthur?"

Range took no notice, and Sheldrake lit a cigar and sat upon the edge of the bed, smoking, Pannell following his example on the window-sill, and Mewburn occupying a chair.

It was not a pleasant position for the man partaking of his meal; but Range felt more stubborn and determined with every mouthful he swallowed, and he went on eating with a kind of defiant look in his eyes, whenever he lifted them from his plate, until he had done.

This was not until Sheldrake had apologetically removed his plate to enable him to partake of tart, and then again for his cheese, while, from time to time, Mewburn re-filled the glass.

"There, that's better," said Sheldrake, at last. "Sorry we cannot have the servant in to wait upon you, my dear boy. Take the tray off, John, old fellow!"

Pannell came slowly from the window seat and lifted the tray from the bed to the table in an elephantine way.

"Shall I fasten him down again now?"

"No, no, not yet! You are too hard and rigid with the poor fellow, John; you are indeed," said Sheldrake. "Let him sit up and rest a bit. It is a long time to be lying on his back."

Pannell smiled grimly and walked back to the window.

"Stop me, doctor, if I go too far," continued Sheldrake. "I don't want to over-ride your rules. Now, then, Arthur, my dear boy, as you seem so much better, what do you say to a cigar?"

"Give me one," said Range, coolly, after a moment's pause, during which he had hesitated, and then told himself that it would be no use to sulk.

Sheldrake took a cigar from his case and handed it to Range, who held it between his fingers for a few moments.

"Is this one of your own growing—from your own plantation?" he said, bitterly.

"No, no! no, no, my dear boy!" said Sheldrake, laughing. "That's right enough. There, choose for yourself, or, Jack, give him one of yours."

Pannell did not leave his place, but growled out—

"That weed's all right, Range."

"I'll take your word," said the latter. "You don't want to move me again to-night?"

"No, no, certainly not," said Sheldrake. "There, take a light, man!"

He struck a vesuvian, and held it while his prisoner began to smoke.

"I thought," continued Sheldrake, "it would be so nice just to have a quiet smoke this evening, and a bit of chat about affairs, then we need not bother you again. You can digest the matter. make your plans, and everything would be settled."

Range gazed at him fixedly as he sat up smoking.

"It is all out of kindness to you," said Sheldrake, coolly removing the ash from the end of his cigar. "You are suffering horribly from plethora—I am right, am I not, doctor?"

"Yes, quite right, plethora."

"So you will have to be bled to the tune of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, my dear brother. How you manage it—by what means you will have that sum placed to our credit—I do not presume to advise you. I merely say, make plans and lay them before us. Am I speaking plainly enough to you?"

"Quite."

"You thoroughly understand me?"

"Quite."

"Then I don't think we need say any more on the subject this evening."

"Yes, we need," said Range, "one word. Suppose I refuse to submit to this piece of swindling extortion?"

"Oh, but you will not refuse."

"I say, if I do?"

"Oh, then, my dear brother, your health must continue to suffer

from this terrible state of plethora, and Doctor Parkins will go on attending you until you get better."

"Exactly," said Mewburn, smiling unpleasantly, "exactly."

"That scoundrel looks as if he could drug or poison me with all the pleasure in life," thought Range, "only I am safe, for it would not answer their purpose."

"Don't worry yourself about it, my dear Arthur," continued Sheldrake. "There is no occasion for hurry or agitation. You are quite safe here—in excellent hands. We have taken this house on lease. It is healthy and retired, and we can all be so happy: such a united family. We shall be greatly respected for our devotion, Jack and I, to our invalid brother; and if you are nice and calm I dare say we shall let you get up to-morrow and sit by the window. Some day we may take you for a drive."

Range went on smoking and gazing straight before him, perfectly unmoved, but realising more and more how tightly he was closed in.

"It is only a matter of time, though," he thought. "If I am calm, then, I shall be allowed to get up: perhaps be taken out for a drive. Let them take me, and, if I do not get away or find help, it will be a strange thing."

"There now, I think we may leave him to his thoughts and his digestion," said Sheldrake, who was watching him very curiously as if trying to read his thoughts. "Ring, John, old fellow, and let's have this tray taken down."

Pannell rose and crossed to the hand-bell, and returned to his seat, after helping to secure Range, who made no resistance this time, but lay back quietly, telling himself that perhaps his best plan was to be patient and wait his opportunity.

The fastening down was just finished when steps were heard in the passage, and Sheldrake opened the door to admit a rustling sound as of a thick silk dress.

"You here?" said Sheldrake, quickly.

There was no answer, and, as Mewburn started up, Sarah Pannell swept into the room.

"What have you come for?" said Pannell, gruffly.

His wife gave him a defiant look with her large dark eyes, and walked straight to the bedside, to stand gazing down at Range.

She was handsomely dressed in black, and her bodice was one mass of jet embroidery, which glittered and flashed in the evening light as she stood facing the window, while as Range watched the malignant look in her handsome bold countenance a feeling of mingled bitterness, shame, and mortification robbed him of all desire to speak.

"How is your patient, doctor?" she said, in a low, deep tone.

"Better; oh, much better!" exclaimed Mewburn.

"Why have you come up?" said Sheldrake, in an angry whisper.

"You can all go now," she said for answer; and she made a hasty gesture towards the door.

"Oh, yes! but——" began Sheldrake.

"Leave the room, all of you!" she exclaimed, angrily.

"Yes, but——"

"I wish to be alone," she cried, with an impatient stamp of her foot.

Pannell came towards her frowning as Sheldrake and Mewburn both exchanged glances with him; but she pointed towards the door, and uttering a low growl he turned to go.

"Here, come away," he said to his companions. "She won't be long."

The feeling that came over Range now was one of helpless rage as he saw the three men quit the room, and then, wonderingly, his eyes followed the woman, who remained passive, with knit brow, and glittering eyes gazing at him where he lay.

Then, turning sharply, she walked to the wall and took down the small oval hand-glass from where it hung upon a nail.

"Now!" she said, shortly, and just then the catch of the door shot back with a smart jar.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A GLANCE IN A MIRROR.

SARAH PANNELL fixed Range with her dark, glittering eyes as she came from the wall, and, as the prisoner looked at her with the glass in her hand, he could not help a grotesque idea or two coming into his head.

"A modern mermaid!" he thought. "Is she going to let down all that magnificent dark hair, and try to win me by favouring me with the spectacle of seeing her comb it?"

Involuntarily there came upon his face so mocking and contemptuous a smile that the woman's eyes flashed, and her lips tightened over her hard-set teeth.

"You had better have had me for a friend," she said, spitefully, and with a look of triumph which set Range wondering how so much pettiness could exist in so noble-looking a woman; but he made no reply.

"Poor fellow, though!" she continued, mockingly; "perhaps I hardly ought to talk to you. Is your head better?"

Range still made no reply, and if he had been free possibly he would have let her go on taunting him; but the very fact of his being bound down there in so degrading a manner roused up the gall and bitterness within, and, after listening to another mocking taunt or two, he said—

"I thought women were always gentle and sympathetic, and above these petty outbursts of malice."

"To those they love," said the woman sharply. "When they are trampled down, and treated with scorn and contumely, they can turn and sting."

"Are you going to sting?" he said, forcing himself to speak coolly.

"Yes," she cried; "you shall find that I am. As I said before, you had better have had me for your friend."

"Just as well I had not," he said. "I don't care about trusting in false friends."

"You would have found me a true one."

"If I had made love to you?" he said, coolly.

"Love? Ha! ha! ha!" she cried. "Love? Oh! it is too ridiculous. Love? I love a poor, weak, imbecile creature like you!"

She burst into a loud, mocking laugh.

"Why, Arthur Range, I was ready to doubt my friends when they told me you were out of your mind. Now I must confess to being a believer. You prove it by your words."

"Say what you please," he replied, bitterly, "it does not affect me. Mad or sane, I dare say I have sufficient self-control to care little for the spite of a vindictive woman."

"Spite? Vindictive? Oh, my poor, helpless, idiotic friend," she cried, "you are utterly mistaken! Why should I be spiteful or vindictive? What is there in you that should attract a woman? Oh, yes! you are decidedly mad. They were quite right."

"As you please," exclaimed Range. "You people treat me as if I were, but you will find me a little more sane than you expect."

"Threatening!" she cried, merrily. "Ah, well! we shall know how to deal with all that. Poor fellow, though—poor fellow! I am very sorry for you—I am indeed."

"Confound the woman! she speaks to me as if I were a dog," he muttered. "What does she mean by flourishing about that hand-glass? Vanity, I suppose. For want of some one to admire her she must admire herself."

In fact, as the woman stood there, she waved the glass to and fro, sending flashes of reflected light here and there dancing upon the ceiling and wall. Then she glanced at herself—with a proud smile of satisfaction at the picture she saw within; but all the time there seemed to be some latent reason for this manipulation of the toilette-glass.

The feeling of triumph seemed to increase, and at last she stood at the foot of the bed staring hard at Range, who remained perfectly calm; but a couple of red spots burned in his cheeks as he resented this outrage in silence.

Every now and then a spiteful smile crossed the woman's face, and lifted her upper lip to give him a glimpse of her white teeth; and as he lay and studied the handsome, cruel-looking face, he began to wonder how it was he could have felt anything like admiration, attributing it to the right cause—being left so much with her and away from others of her sex.

"How long is she going to stop?" said Range to himself. "What does the woman mean?"

"Well," she said, with a suddenness that made him start, "I told you that my time would come, and that I should have you suing to me. You see that I was right."

She made a movement towards him, glass in hand, but checked herself directly, as if the time had not quite arrived.

"Are you under the impression that you are triumphing over me?" he said, coolly.

"Under the impression?" she replied, quickly. "I am triumphing over you, as I knew I should."

"Pray spare yourself the trouble," he replied. "You are only degrading yourself—making yourself lower in my eyes than you were before."

She turned upon him angrily, but checked herself.

"You are becoming womanly in your weakness," she said, with a scornful look. "I did not know that a man's strength was in his tongue."

"Go away, and leave me to myself," he said, bitterly. "I have no strength now, save in my tongue. If you have anything to say, pray speak, and let me hear it. Then go, and let me be in peace."

"Peace! Why should you be in peace?" she said, mockingly. "But there, I will not waste time by staying here. I told you that my hour of triumph would come. I tell you again that it has come. Are you going to beg of me for that which you tried to win?"

"There is the door," he said, coldly.

"I say, are you going to beg for love and liberty, and for my help against these men? If so, beg and pray and sue, and see what answer I will give you. Time back I would have been your friend and helped to save you. Now——"

"Well," he said, mockingly, for she had stopped.

"Now——"

She repeated the word, hesitating and playing nervously with the hand-glass. She took a step towards him, stopped, took a step again, and, as if nerving herself at last to the effort, she thrust the glass just before his eyes, exclaiming—

"Look! look! Do you think I could care now to trouble myself for such an imbecile creature as that?"

She held out the glass before Range, so that he could see his face, but he did not look in; he contented himself with gazing full in her eyes, giving her a look so full of tolerant contempt for her childish spite that she winced beneath it as if she had been struck.

But she recovered herself directly, and her face grew more malicious as she exclaimed—

"Are you afraid to look at your face? Is it too handsome for you?"

"I know my face by heart," he said, "and I am beginning to know yours, and to read your mind within. There, leave me. You are not torturing me. You are annoying yourself. Men do not care for the glass like women."

"Look! look!" she exclaimed.

"Why should I look?" he replied, turning his head from the glass so as to thoroughly fix her with his gaze. "I have no desire to see myself tied down here. I know all the glass can show me."

"Look!" she cried again, fiercely; and as she bent down she dexterously intercepted his gaze with the glass, holding it between them, and covering her own face.

Range was about to turn away with a gesture of contempt, but he was not so quick that he did not catch a glimpse of his features.

That glimpse forced him to turn his eyes full upon the oval mirror, and in spite of himself the face he saw there, denuded of moustache and beard, and with his hair almost cut as short as if it had been shaven, made him utter a cry of horror and dismay.

"Ah!" he exclaimed; "this is too much!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the woman—a forced, hysterical laugh. "A man cares nothing for the glass; he is above self-admiration, and here is Adonis mourning for his lost good looks!"

"The cowardly, treacherous scoundrels!" panted Range.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the woman, with her malicious face working, and the laughter sounding more forced than ever. "You see your appearance is quite in sympathy with the character you bear. There, there, poor fellow: be calm, be calm!"

"Calm?" cried Range, fiercely. "I was pretty well determined before that I would not give way to their demands. Now, I would sooner throw all I possess into the Atlantic and see it sink than yield up a cent. Tell them that with all their scheming and cleverness they have overshot the mark."

"Poor passionate idiot!" she said, with mock sympathy.

"Yes; but the poor passionate idiot is the most obstinate kind of creature there is to deal with. There, go! You are only a miserable weak woman, and your pitiful triumph is merely bitterness to you. I tell you that you have failed."

"Failed? Oh, no," she said, triumphantly; "but I have not finished yet. I promised to bring you to my knees. That time has yet to come."

"Yes," he said, "it has yet to come."

"And it will come soon, Arthur, and then ——"

"Yes, I know what then," he replied. "You only think you know."

He could not rise, but his head and neck were free, and, turning away from her with a look full of contempt and disgust, he remained with his eyes closed till, with the rage she felt at his look and speech mastering her, she threw the hand-glass upon the bed and walked out of the room like an offended tragedy-queen, but spoiling the effect at the last moment by displaying the feminine pettiness of her nature and giving the door a hearty slam.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

INSIDE THE CAGE.

"I SHALL never be able to bear this," said Range as he lay there with a strange numbness and tingling coming into his limbs. For though, in spite of whatever may be said by doctors to the effect

that lying on the back is the pleasantest and most rest-giving of attitudes, the very fact that you are obliged to keep in that position, and that, however much disposed, you cannot change it, makes it terribly irksome and wearying.

"I shall never be able to bear this," sighed Range, as the night came on apace, and he heard nothing but the occasional rumble of trains and the distant barking of a dog.

Now he wrenched himself a little on one side, now on the other, as he thought on his right side of the extortionate demand of this gang of swindlers; on his left side of Sarah Pannell, her malice, and her bitter display of anger and triumph.

"I've dropped into a nice hornet's nest," he muttered. "This is coming for a foreign tour with a vengeance! How I do ache, to be sure! I shall never be able to bear it."

Just as he arrived at this point for about the hundredth time—and this, as he believed, the final time—he had his first lesson in how much human nature can bear, how elastic it is, and that it can be dragged out to a terrible extent before it will give way.

He fell fast asleep, and began, in that pleasant habit of humanity, to gather strength for the troubles that were still to come.

The bright morning sunshine awoke him after a sleep so deep that only one dream came to trouble him, and that was of the woods at Elmthorpe, with the faces of Captain Carleigh and Judith floating before his disturbed vision.

He felt stiff and numbed, but all the same he was refreshed. His head was clearer, and for a few minutes he lay enjoying those moments wherein the ordinary healthy being devotes himself to trying to invent an excuse for not getting up.

Range had no occasion to invent excuses, but lay thinking; and then, as the full extent of his miserable position came upon him, he gathered himself together and gave a spring which shook the bed, and tested the strength of the straps and buckles by which he was secured.

Just before he went to sleep he had been thinking that it was physically impossible for him to hold out against men who resorted to what was little better than so much torture to gain their ends.

The night's rest had entirely changed his views, and he found himself more stubborn and determined than before.

"I shall beat them," he said. "One's manhood demands it, society demands it; and if I don't bring these scoundrels to justice it will be because matters have gone very hard with me indeed."

It was very early morning, and, with the buoyancy of spirit that comes after rest, he began to think over the various escapes of which he had read, beginning with those of Baron Trenck and ending with those of Peter Simple with O'Brien, and of Edmond Dantes.

"If I set my wits to work to escape out of this house, I don't think they will be able to keep me," he said, with a feeling of hopefulness growing stronger in his breast, and without calculating upon the fact that his enemies had bound him with fetters stronger than those used

in ordinary prisons, or that by branding him as being so insane that it was necessary to furnish him always with a medical attendant of his own, they had fenced him in with a palisade that acted as a strong outwork to the great red-brick wall.

"It must be by night," he thought, as he lay planning means of escape; "and I must throw them off their guard by seeming in despair. That girl, perhaps, may help me, and if she will not there are other means."

"Pshaw! The idea of thinking that I am to be kept here by a few straps and bars!"

Oddly enough, his personal appearance had not occurred to him as being likely to interfere with his movements. He had for the time being let slip the memory of the picture he had seen in that glass, and he was busy trying to work out some plan when he heard the opening of the further door and steps in the passage, and then the outer and inner doors of his room were opened, and his captors walked in.

"Morning!" said Sheldrake, cheerfully. "Lovely morning, Arthur!"

Range's teeth gritted together at the scoundrel's easy assumption of brotherly familiarity; but he did not speak. He turned his eyes away from the crafty, unpleasant countenance of Mewburn, and in so doing they rested on the frank-looking, big-bearded face of Jack Pannell, who gave him a friendly nod, and without thinking he responded to it shortly.

"Well, doctor," continued Sheldrake, who looked bland and pleasant and clerical as he turned smilingly to his companion, "I shall not wait for your report: I say he's better."

Mewburn advanced to the bedside, smiling too.

"Yes, I need not ask; his clear eyes tell me beforehand that he has rested well. You are right, Mr. Range: our patient is decidedly better."

"And he may get up to-day?"

"Ye—es; oh, yes! I think so. It will be a pleasant change for him, certainly! Yes. The fit has gone off entirely, and he may be up for a few hours."

"Hear that, my dear boy," said Sheldrake. "I am glad. Come, Jack, undo these Philistine bonds, and let's have the poor fellow on his feet again. Let me see: his clothes are in that drawer, are they not?"

Pannell nodded, walked to the drawers, and took from one a pair of cricketing-flannels and a white Norfolk jacket of the same material.

"These will be cool and easy for you, my dear Arthur," said Sheldrake, smiling. "Come, make haste and get stronger, and I dare say, one of these days, we shall be able to have you down in the garden."

Range made no reply, for the very presence of this man seemed to give him the sensation known as heartburn, and his very finger-ends twitched with the desire to be up and at him in some fierce struggle.

"It will come some time," he thought, "and then——"

He turned his attention to Pannell, who, in obedience to a nod from his leader, approached the bed, while Range's heart leaped as he felt them untie the sleeves of the strait-waistcoat; and then, as he sat up, they unfastened the back and took it off.

"That's better, Arthur," said Sheldrake, as he watched Pannell and Mewburn, looking more smooth and clerical every minute, and thoroughly acting his part. "Now he must be a good boy, and not be violent again, and want to go strangling people, and then that nasty thing won't be put on any more."

"You villain!" was upon Range's lips, but he choked the words down.

"Now the straps, doctor. Poor boy! his limbs must be quite stiff with being fastened down so long."

He was quite right, for, as the bonds were removed, the prisoner found that, while his body, acting upon the suggestion of his brain, was ready to bound out of bed, his limbs utterly refused their office, and he lay quite still.

Sheldrake noted this, and spoke.

"Look here, doctor, the poor boy would rather be nearly alone now. Suppose you and I take a turn or two up and down the passage, while brother Jack acts as valet, and lends him a hand. He is used to him, you see."

"Quite right, quite right!" said Mewburn; and the two left the room.

"Legs a bit stiff?" said Pannell, in his deep bass.

"Numbed," replied Range, bitterly. "I can't move them."

"Let's lend you a hand," said Pannell, with gruff sympathy.

"Arms first. Ah! they are a bit stiff, too!"

He threw off the tight serge jacket he wore, rolled up his shirt-sleeves over his huge arms, and, taking one of Range's between his hands, he submitted it to a good sharp friction. Then he served the other the same, and, finally, the prisoner's ankles.

"Look here," he said, as Range lay quite passive in the giant's grasp, "take it coolly, and don't rile *him*. Then you won't be tied up—not much."

Range frowned, and his lips quivered with the emotion caused by his sense of misery and helplessness; but, as he found that with a little help, which he shrank from, but which he was compelled to accept, he could get his legs to the floor, his spirits began to rise again, and by degrees he dressed himself, the cold water refreshing him greatly.

"That's better," said Pannell, gruffly. "Look here, of course we two can't be friends, and I'm going to act square to my mates, for I'm dead against you; but I don't want to be harder upon you than I can help."

"Thank you," said Range, bitterly, as he finished his toilette by glancing in the glass; for he had no hair to brush, no razors to use; and as he looked at himself with his closely-cropped head and white costume his heart sank again, for he felt that he looked as like an insane patient as it was possible for him to appear.

There was no time for further conversation, for just then Sheldrake opened the door and stepped in, followed by Mewburn.

"Dressed?" he cried. "That's right! Arthur's himself again, eh, doctor?"

Range ground his teeth, for this make-believe chatter irritated him so that it was hard work to keep calm, though he felt that his time had not yet come.

"Look here!" he cried, with his eyes flashing and cheeks aflame, "stop that banter when you are here with me. It makes me feel that it would be justifiable if I choked the life out of your scoundrelly carcase; but the law might think otherwise and arrange for another form of imprisonment. Besides, I don't want to have the load on my conscience of having killed a man!"

"Still a little too much excited, eh, doctor?" said Sheldrake, in a whisper.

"Yes, yes, a little; but he will cool down over his breakfast."

"Strange how they form these prejudices against those they love," whispered Sheldrake, so that Range should hear him; and, though he saw plainly enough that the man's purpose was to irritate him and incite him to insane actions, his annoyance was so great that he made a step towards the speaker.

Just then there was a tap on his shoulder, and, in a gruff growl, Pannell said—

"Steady, my lad, steady! Sit down!"

He drew up a chair, and, laying his hands upon Range, pressed him into it, whispering—

"There, you don't want the waistcoat on again, I'm sure."

Range threw himself back, frowning, and turned his face away from the occupants of the room.

"That's better," said Sheldrake; "much better, doctor. Poor fellow! I won't shrink from him, though he should fly at me. Ah! here is his breakfast."

There was a tap at the door just then. Pannell opened it, and Jane entered with a tray; but at the sight of Range her lips parted, and she looked as if she were about to drop the tray, shrinking towards the door the while.

"Come along, you silly girl!" said Sheldrake; "he will not hurt you."

Range's brow grew rugged, and he felt as if some spasm had shot through him, for the action of the servant taught him how he was likely to seem to strangers; and he began now fully to realise the strength of the web that had been spun round him by the gang in whose power he stood.

"I—I—are you——?" stammered the girl.

"Put the tray on the table and be off!" said Pannell, roughly.

The girl needed no second bidding, but set the tray down heavily, and retreated quickly, amidst the laughter of all present but Range, whose heart sank lower and lower as, staring straight before him, he seemed to be gazing full in the glass at the strangely-altered face that he hardly knew.

"There, my dear boy," said Sheldrake, cheerily, "you'll find everything you want, I think; and now we're going to leave you to enjoy your breakfast by yourself. The things shall be fetched by-and-by. You may thank Dr. Parkins for this. Now good-bye for the present—good-bye!"

He nodded pleasantly, and, followed by his companions, left the room.

CHAPTER XL.

OUTSIDE THE CAGE.

RANGE sat still, listening intently as the doors were fastened and the steps died away down the passage, after which he heard the further door closed.

He was alone, and free to move about, and, starting up, he made for the window, but staggered and reeled into a chair, for his legs still felt numbed and helpless with their long confinement.

"Ah!" he groaned, "they will cripple me if I am kept like this."

He rose again, and this time managed to reach one of the windows, held on by an iron bar and sat down on the window-seat, gazing out eagerly over the garden and country beyond.

It was not an inspiring scene, for almost from the garden-wall, right away to where the waters of a muddy canal wound through the flat, dejected-looking country, there were brick-fields—fields with rows upon rows of dark-grey piled-up bricks, which rows men with long barrows were lengthening; fields with smoking kilns and half-built piles of unburned bricks; fields full of holes—half water, half mud—and at whose edges, close by a series of dirty sheds, miserable, dejected-looking horses, each with a bandage across its eyes, as if there for execution, tramped round and round, grinding in the mills the clay that was, so to speak, mixed with their very lives before it was moulded into bricks.

The distance was far, but in the clear morning air everything looked distinct; and as Range opened the window a little higher a creaking, rattling, melancholy sound of rusty chains came upon his ear. Now and then a hoarse voice shouted some order, and beneath the shed he could see boys, covered with clay from head to heel, busily bearing lumps of the plastic material to the benches, where men moulded it into shape. Some of the half-naked boys hugged the lumps they carried to their bare chests, others bore them on their heads; but all were busy toiling away, as if in some vast human ant city, building it up of clay.

Away beyond, all at once, he saw a white feathery plume of steam appear at a distance to his right, and this came nearer and nearer, till, with the thunderous roar with which he was familiar, a train rushed by, setting the prisoner wondering how far he would be from the next station in case he could make his escape; and then his eyes ran over the desolation before him once again as he calculated how good a place that would be to make for at once, could he get out, for there were a hundred hiding-places he might reach.

Satisfied with the aspect of the field, and that his window looked straight out from the back of the house, he turned his attention to what was near at hand, to find there was an extensive garden, surrounded by a very high crumbling old red-brick wall. Laurels and other shrubs were plentiful. There was evidently a great cedar away to the right, for its huge, flat, frond-like boughs came into the scope of his vision. Tall elms were at the bottom, and here and there, towering above the shrubs, were fine old fruit-trees, some being so near the wall that it seemed possible that a man could climb one and make his way from thence to the top.

Yes, once in the garden it did not seem as if it would be so very hard a task for an active man to get out.

"I'd manage it somehow," thought Range, as his eyes were busy still wandering round.

It was a fine old place, that had apparently been much neglected, but something was being done to put it in order. Some one had been cutting and pruning, for there was a heap of smouldering rubbish that sent a faint pillar of bluish smoke into the morning air. Some one had been digging too, for there was a bed of newly turned up earth, and an old stump, forming a rustic flower-basket, had been freshly ornamented with blooming geraniums, whose bright scarlet seemed to relieve the intense green of the overgrown place.

Range's eyes grasped all these at once, and spent no time over them. He admired trees, but on the present occasion it was from the point of which would conceal him should he hide, and which would act as ladders should he wish to scale the wall.

"Oh, it will be easy enough," he muttered, as he turned his attention now to the window and its strong bars. "Stout enough, but I can get one of these out, and then I could perhaps climb down the old ivy, or—yes, better still, it would be hoisting them with their own petard—cut up the strait-waistcoat and straps to make a rope. There's no occasion to despair. They have me, but they'll find it hard to keep me shut up here. Once down in that garden I'd——"

Range stopped short, fascinated by something that came slowly out from beneath the window and walked into the middle of a sunny patch, where some grass newly mown from the lawn lay in a heap.

Here the object stretched itself and then yawned, displaying in the huge gape it made two rows of the brightest and sharpest-looking of teeth, closing them with a snap, and then standing there the biggest and ugliest bull-dog Range had ever seen.

"And not chained up!" he said to himself.

It was evidently a guardian of the place.

Two guardians!

For just then another, bigger, uglier, and more fierce of aspect, came out of the shade and trotted slowly up to the first, uttering a low, menacing growl; and then, taking a comprehensive look round, it threw itself upon its side in the sun, and lay blinking lazily, while its companion couched and looked on.

Range drew a long breath with a hissing noise between his teeth,

and inadvertently made it sufficiently loud to cause the dogs to bound to their feet, cock their ears, and stare up at him. Then together they set up a furious, deep-mouthed baying, which resulted in a heavy footstep, and Pannell ran out.

"What is it, boys?" he exclaimed; and then, seeing the direction of the dogs' eyes, he nodded at Range. "Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. "Good dogs then! Lie down, boys! Good dogs then!"

He stooped and patted the thick heads of the two animals, which gradually allowed themselves to be soothed down, but not without first one and then the other breaking out in a savage, growling bay at the closely-shaven white figure up at the window, which seemed to have excited no little animosity in their breasts.

Pannell went out of sight, and the dogs settled down, but with their eyes fixed upon Range at the window, from which he at last drew away.

"The savage brutes!" he said to himself. "Of course they are there to keep me in."

He walked up and down the room for a minute or two, and then exclaimed excitedly,

"I don't know that I should much mind the bite of a dog if it were not for the thought of what might come afterwards."

He could not help a shudder—an excusable shudder—as he thought that he was shut up there reputed to be mad, and that the bite of a savage dog might possibly produce reality in place of fiction.

"What nonsense!" he said, with a hearty laugh. "A man whose boyhood was spent amongst dangers and difficulties, damped at the first outset? Here, I want some food."

He sat down and ate heartily of the breakfast, and, as his meal progressed, calm matter-of-fact thought resumed its sway.

"My course is plain enough," he exclaimed. "Just as I mapped it out before, keep them in play till I can escape—and escape of course I shall. What is to hinder me—iron bars—the height—dogs—a wall?"

He finished his coffee, and then, as he set down his cup—

"I can get a bar out—in time.

"That's one difficulty.

"I can lower myself down.

"That's two.

"As for the dogs—well, three ways of getting over them suggest themselves.

"Make friends. That I can do with food.

"Poison them. That I think I could contrive, though I should not like to kill the poor brutes.

"Get them shut up on the night I mean to get away.

"How to manage that?"

Just then there was the muffled sound of some one singing in the next room, and the sharp clink of a ewer being set back in its basin.

"There I am," cried Range joyfully. "That's about the plainest girl I ever saw in my life; but just now her voice sounds almost

angelic, and I am beginning to think her the nicest specimen of humanity in the whole world."

He sat listening, and the singing came louder—a plaintive, wild, old West-country ditty that was musical enough; and as he listened, in spite of the partition, he could catch the words here and there.

It was something about the tender passion, and, as far as Range could make out, a lady was presenting at a would-be lover a metaphorical shield in the shape of a description of the gentleman who had already won her affections.

There was a thump of a pail vigorously set down, then a splash, and then a curious noise which Range made out to be scrubbing, and then a pause with the soft plashing sound of falling water. Then came plainly enough,

"His sloe-black eyes *and* his curly hair,
His pleasing voice *did* my heart ensnare."

More scrubblings and a thump, followed by plashing and dripping water as a flannel was wrung out. Then—

"Genteel he was, *but* no rake like you,
To persuade a maiden—
To per—her—suade a maiden *to* forsake the jacket blue."

"The old story," said Range to himself. "'Oh! 'tis love, 'tis love that makes the world go round!' Now I'll be bound to say that she—what the dickens was that fellow's name I read about with Judith?—I know: Caliban—that she Caliban has a lover perhaps as plain as herself, and that they are desperately fond of each other. So much the better. She will have a woman's heart, and perhaps she'll help me. I must make friends."

The neighbouring room was apparently being thoroughly scrubbed, and, after listening to the noise and singing for some little time, Range left his chair and walked close up to the wall, where he tapped softly with the handle of a fork.

The scrubbing ceased; there was a bang and rattle, as if some one had kicked a pail, and then silence.

"Don't be frightened!" said Range, softly; but all was very still as he stood listening.

Then he tapped again.

"Don't be frightened, my girl!" he said again. "I'm shut up tight in here."

He listened for a few minutes, and then tapped.

"I've frightened her quite away, and perhaps she has gone down to tell them!"

He listened, and all was perfectly still; but he tapped again, and a trembling voice came from the other side—

"Go away directly, or I'll tell Dr. Parkins!"

"No, no; don't do that!" said Range. "What are you afraid of?"

There was a pause, and then came the word—

"You!"

"What nonsense!" said Range. "Just as if I should hurt you if we were together! Why, the wall is between us."

"Yes; but you might break out."

"If I did I should not hurt you. Why are you afraid of me?"

There was a pause, and then the answer came—

"Because you're mad, and you look so dreadful."

"So would you if some one cut off all that beautiful long hair."

"That's true enough," Range added to himself; "but I hope she won't think it's a compliment."

"I should just like to catch anybody a-doing it, that's all!" came back.

"Of course you would—I mean, of course you would not. What a stupid way of speaking!" he added to himself. Then, aloud—

"Don't be frightened of me again when you come into the room."

A pause.

"Well, I'll try not; but mad people don't always know what they're a-doing of, do they?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Range. "I'm not mad."

"That's what they all say. I went over Hanwell once, and all the people said that they were not mad."

"Did they?"

"Yes."

"Ah, well! I'm not mad, and I'm shut up here all alone, and I want you to be friends and talk to me when you come up there. Will you?"

"I—I don't know. If I did they'd send me away."

"Ah! Well, then, we must keep it a secret. I won't tell if you won't."

"Oh, I won't!" said the girl, eagerly.

"Then that's settled."

"Yes; and I must get on with my work. It's cleaning-day."

"I won't stop you; but you will not be afraid of me again?"

"N—no! I'll try not."

"And, when you come up there, if I knock you'll come and talk to me?"

"Ye—es!"

"How am I to know it's you?"

"I'll—I'll cough," said the girl, readily. "Hush! I can hear somebody coming."

There was a thump and a splash as the pail was moved, and then the scrubbing began again, but ceased, and a man's voice was heard in gruff tones.

"Found out!" said Range, as he listened intently, with his heart sinking, for it seemed that just as he was about to make a friend, the watchfulness of his captors was going to end the intimacy.

There was a painful pause, and then Range hurried to the window, to stand there listening, for he heard the noise of bolts shooting, and next there were steps in the passage.

"What does this mean?" he said, standing on his guard, as the door was suddenly thrown open.

CHAPTER XLI.

PANNELL AS A GARDENER.

RANGE'S was a false alarm, for when the door opened in that sudden way it was only Sheldrake and Pannell, who threw it back so as to be clear in case of attack.

They ushered in the girl, who, with sleeves rolled above the elbow, fetched the breakfast-tray.

"She's trustworthy," thought Range, as, evidently intending their communication to be a secret, the girl went out without giving him a look.

"Now then," said Sheldrake, smilingly; "when you are disposed to settle up only give me a hint, my dear boy. Till then we are very happy and comfortable. So are you. When you grow tired of being shut up, you can say so, and then we'll set to work and finish off the business."

He spoke like this several times, and, after a little repetition, Range used to turn from the scoundrel in disgust.

In this manner a week passed, then another. He had seen no more of Sarah Pannell, though he had heard her voice several times in the garden talking to Jack, who was busy there from morning till night turning the wilderness into an extremely pretty, orderly old place, gardening being evidently a favourite occupation with him.

"My three bull-dogs," said Range, as he watched the progress of affairs—the dogs following Jack Pannell down to his work, and settling themselves in comfortable positions where they could see the amateur gardener, and occasionally turn an eye up at Range, who was at his window.

Sometimes Jack Pannell would stop to wipe his brow, and then he too would turn up his face towards Range and give him a friendly nod.

"I ought to hate the scoundrel," Range said to himself; "but I don't. He's rather a likeable sort of blackguard, full of fidelity to his companions. Pity he has such a wife."

Consequently, as a relief from the horrible *ennui* produced by his confinement, Range used to watch and take a good deal of interest in the progress of the garden, planning mentally what ought to be done, and, to his great satisfaction, often seeing Pannell attack this very part and daily improve the place.

So far the prisoner had made no attempt to cultivate the acquaintance of the dogs—opportunity had not served; but he fed the sparrows regularly, quite a little flock coming to the sill for crumbs, and, what they liked better, tiny little broken scraps of biscuit, while one he had dubbed the Captain loved nothing better than to set to work pecking the morsels left upon a plate.

Range had quite a little party of friends among the sparrows. There was Uncle Wash—for he named them all—Sir Harry, Sir Robert, Burton, the Captain, and Judith. At first he used to mix them up a little, it being hard to tell Sir Harry from Sir Robert; but

he was never wrong over Uncle Wash, the Captain, or Judith, and the tameness of these little creatures increased day by day.

Perhaps their instinct taught them that there was nothing to fear from a prisoner in a larger sort of cage, so they came boldly up to his bars, chirped and played about the sill, and roosted at night in the ivy.

One morning the three conspirators, as Range dubbed them, entered the room as usual, for they paid him a visit once a day at least, and looked carefully about to see that no attempt had been made to escape.

"Well, Arthur, my dear boy, tired out?"

Range did not answer, but remained seated by the window.

"Going to settle up to-day?"

Still no answer.

"Ah, well! I suppose you'll cave in soon," said Sheldrake.

"Looks nice and fine out of doors."

"Pannell," said Range, whose temper was short that morning, "kick that scoundrel out!"

"No, don't, John!" said Sheldrake, good-humouredly. "Say, Arthur, I've been thinking how curious this must seem to you. Land of liberty, you know, and you shut up—held to ransom!"

Range turned away his head.

"Must seem like one of the games they carry on in Italy and Greece, eh? Best of the fun is, that if you could write and tell your friends that you had been captured in Yorkshire by brigands—by Fra Diavolo and Co. in modern costume—they wouldn't believe you. What would they say about him, Doctor Parkins?"

"They'd say he was mad."

"Yes, of course. Ha! ha! ha! Look here, dear boy, the maid's coming to give you a good scrub out to-day, and we're not going to stop and have our shoes filled; and, besides, you're going to have a visitor."

Range's heart leaped. Who would the visitor be—some one to whom he could appeal for freedom?

"Come along!" said Sheldrake. "Look sharp, Jack!"

Pannell took the strait-waistcoat from where it had been hanging outside, and advanced towards the prisoner, who started from his seat and drew back.

"I'm not going to have on that disgraceful thing again!" he exclaimed.

"My dear boy, it is for your good," said Sheldrake, with a sneering smile. "The doctor thinks it's for the best."

Range retreated, with his eye beginning to flash, and a menacing, fierce look coming into his face.

"Now, then," growled Pannell, "don't be ugly! Come and have it on!"

Range's teeth set and clenched as he recalled being bound down to that bed, and, forgetting his determination to patiently wait for an opportunity to escape, he made up his mind that he would suffer that indignity no more.

"Keep back!" he cried, fiercely. "You shall not treat me like that again!"

"Close in!" said Pannell, sharply, and he advanced without hesitation to the attack.

CHAPTER XLII

MAKING AN ENEMY.

"It seems to be a truce between us for the present," thought Carleigh, as he and Alice met day by day, and save that there was a slight coldness in their manner, it would have taken a close observer to note that anything was wrong.

For Lady Fanshaw was polite to him in the presence of her husband, but she took care not to be left with him alone, keeping Judith by her side as a safeguard for both; and the latter was in no wise unwilling to spend all the time spared from her uncle with her cousin, whose dislike for Carleigh seemed to increase day by day.

It was a kind of reparation, Alice Fanshaw told herself, and, after devoting herself tenderly to Judith in the evening, she would pray that she might never realise the blow that had fallen upon her, but look upon Range's absence as the result of a slight.

Meanwhile Carleigh could not keep away from the Wilderness, and it became a matter of course for his steps to take that direction, so that he could watch the progress of every plant and strand, the unrolling of every fern.

He had had no opportunity of getting the thin saw. In fact he hardly dared leave the place for fear something should happen in his absence, so he waited and watched.

One afternoon the desire came upon him to see if the spade-handle was sufficiently covered up, and after combating it for a time he walked down, looking furtively here and there to see if he would be alone, when, all at once, he stopped short, with a terrible suffocating feeling at his chest.

He began to tremble; the sweat stood in great drops upon his forehead; and for a few moments he could not move, but stood staring wildly, and listening as a panting, scuffling noise was kept up, earth, stones, and twigs being torn out and thrown to some distance, to fall pattering amongst the leaves and ferns.

He knew what it was, but it was some few minutes before he could master himself sufficiently to pick up three or four pieces of stone and go forward towards where, just at the foot of the mass that had come down from above, and at the side farthest from the water, Bess was scuffling and scratching and tearing away, growing more and more excited as she drew out the earth and stones with her fore-paws and threw them back with her hind.

"Beast! wretch!" cried Carleigh, hurling a piece of stone at the dog with such good aim that he struck her a violent blow on the side.

Bess bounded back and faced him, snarling at him furiously, and

he hurled another which made her begin to retreat, while a third stone sent her growling away.

Carleigh stood looking after the dog with the ugly twitch coming again and again to distort his countenance. Then, after glancing round to see that he was not observed, he glared, trembling the while, in at the hole that the dog had scratched, half expecting to see some ghastly memento of the keen-scented creature's search.

He shuddered, though, and began to hurriedly push back the earth and stones with his feet, piling in rough pieces, and then drawing the ferns over the new-looking place, to conceal, as well as he could, the scar that the dog had made.

Then, with the full intention of returning armed with a trowel, he went back to the house, and looked from side to side for likely ferns to dig up and plant to cover the mischief.

And suppose the dog began again?

Carleigh's forehead was wet as in imagination he saw Burton encouraging the brute in its task, and discovering those ghastly remains.

Then he began thinking about the flask, and its return to his room.

He had never made any inquiries about it—he had not dared; but from the first he had suspected the keeper, whose manner towards him had been very strange.

"If he saw me?" thought Carleigh. "He may have seen me that night or that morning, watching as he does all night."

He dropped into a seat in an agony so intense that he felt that he could do anything sooner than suffer like this, and at last, unable to bear the sensation more, he watched his opportunity, and, for the sake of doing something to occupy his mind and make his position more safe, he took a trowel from a garden-basket used by Judith, thrust it in his pocket, and walked slowly back towards the Wilderness, smoking a cigar.

He stopped twice, and dug up a couple of shield-ferns, the bracken being too deeply rooted; and he did this boldly, telling himself that no one would notice him if he were seen; and, this done, he was going coolly down to the spot where the dog had been busy, when he heard a gruff voice that he knew well enough exclaim—

"Down, Bess! To heel!"

He needed no telling what was going on. The dog had gone back to begin tearing out the earth and stones he had piled up, and Burton was there looking on, making sure of the truth of something he already knew by halves.

Carleigh wanted no telling, but he felt that he must watch—that he must see what was going on, even to being present when the discovery was made.

He left the path then, and crept cautiously along among the trees, through patches of bracken and ivy, stepping lightly, till he was so near that he felt that from his post of vantage high up he would be able to see what went on down below.

He was quite right. From where he was he could see right down

into the gully with its brawling streams, and there was Bess creeping forward once again to the hole, but only to be ordered back by Burton, who offered to Carleigh's gaze something fresh, and set him trembling and thinking of his own future, and what discovery really meant.

For there was the keeper, with his coat off and a crowbar in his hand, softly loosening the stones that covered the handle of the spade, resting upon the crowbar with one hand till he had removed the pieces.

Then, using the stout iron like a lever, and striking with it a few heavy blows, he rapidly opened and loosened a way, which enabled him at last to raise the stone a little with the great iron, bearing down one hand, while he worked the spade-handle about with the other.

Sam Burton was a handy man at such a job as this—armed, too, with such a tool, and at the end of a couple of minutes he had dragged out the spade and thrown it down beside the crowbar, but only to pick up the spade again, level the ground, and fill up the hole before shouldering both, and, climbing up the far side of the gully, disappearing in amongst the trees.

"He knows all," thought Carleigh, as he watched the spot where Burton had disappeared.

Then he turned his eyes to the slip of rock, and ground his teeth as he saw Bess there sniffing at the bottom.

Just then a loud whistle sounded from among the trees, and the dog pricked her ears, bounded up the bank, and disappeared on the other side.

"He knows all," said Carleigh again, as he stood watching the place, not daring to go down and see what traces keeper and dog had left.

He did not move for a good half-hour. Then he threw down the two roots of fern, whose leaves he had been unwittingly pinching and crumpling up in his sinewy hands.

He was about to go up to the house, but he examined his hands, which were stained by the soil.

"I'm no coward after all!" he muttered. "I can force my will!" and he sturdily forced himself to go down to the edge of the streamlet, close to which the keeper had laid bare the spade; and, as he bent down low and washed his hands in the limpid water, his eyes were busy looking at the newly-moved earth and stones, and wondering whether the keeper would take any further steps, or be content with finding the spade.

"Curse that bird!" cried Carleigh, angrily. "It's watching me again."

For there was the robin, larged-eyed and thoughtful-looking, gazing at his every act.

CHAPTER XLIII.

SAM BURTON IS UNEASY.

"WELL, Milly, my lass," said Sam Burton one morning, "you and I don't seem to be on the gainest way to make a match of it."

"Oh, dear no, Mr. Burton!" said the bright-eyed little maid. "I never think of such things."

"That's because thou'rt so fresh and young, my lass. But I'd take it kind of thee if thou'dst say, let's be man and wife."

"Oh, no! I couldn't, Mr. Burton!"

"Say Sam, Milly, dear."

"Well, there, Sam, then," said the girl. "There, it's of no use you talking to me about being married; I'm ever so much too young yet."

"Suppose——"

"Well, suppose what?" said Milly, for the keeper stopped.

"Suppose anything was to happen to me, my lass."

"Oh, Sam!"

"Nay, my lass, I don't know that owt is going to happen, but, you see, a man like me has a deal to do among guns when people's shooting, and accidents does happen."

"You're saying this, Sam, to frighten me, and make me——; there, I won't say what I was going to say."

"Well, my lass, I'll be honest wi' you; perhaps I was, but you see keeper's is a strange and risky sort o' life, what wi' gentlemen shooting wild, and portchers, and such-like."

"Then you shouldn't touch the poachers, Sam."

"Nay, my lass, don't thee say that! It's my duty to the best master as ever lived, and whose bread I eat. Say, Milly, you wouldn't like it if I weer a bit hurt, would'st ta?"

"I do wish you wouldn't talk nonsense in that broad way, Sam, Burton, when you can speak as well as I can if you like."

"I'll talk as thou likes, Milly, if thou'lt——there, if *you'll* only be my little wife. There, my pretty bairn, never mind the black-berries now, but listen to me."

"Oh! There, you made me prick my finger with the nasty thorn; and, see, it bleeds!"

"Poor pretty little hand!" said Sam Burton, laying his gun down, with the barrel resting upon the dog's back, while she couched at his feet, open-mouthed and panting, as she watched the pair at the edge of a copse with her great liquid eyes.

Sam took the reluctantly-yielded hand, and kissed the bleeding finger, but only for it to be snatched away, the girl's cheeks turning scarlet.

"Don't!" she cried. "There, I must go! Her ladyship's going to drive over herself with Miss Judith to meet the shooting-party, and I'm to come, too, and help with the lunch."

"You coming, Milly?" cried the keeper, with his eyes sparkling.

"Yes; Miss Judith said they didn't want one of the footmen in the pony-carriage; and if you behave yourself very nicely I'll see that you have plenty to eat."

"I'd a strange deal rather you fed me with a few kind words, my lass," said the keeper.

"Oh, nonsense! what's the good of being married? I'm sure her ladyship don't seem any the happier."

"No," said Burton, frowning.

"And the captain and Miss Judith look as if they hated one another."

"Milly," said the keeper, "has——"

"Has what?"

"Has the captain touched you again?"

"No, not once."

The keeper uttered a sigh full of content, and just then a bell rang at the Priory.

"That's breakfast," cried Milly. "There, good-bye, Sam."

"Good-bye, dear lass, for the present, and thankye for coming. I shall go happy to my job to-day now."

"So you would without, Sam."

"Nay, my lass, I shouldn't, for I should have been too low-sperreted."

"Nonsense! There, good-bye for the present."

The girl avoided his hand and ran off.

"Bless her pretty face!" said Burton, looking after her. "She's skittish, and slips from me, but I think she likes me. Eh! what wonder that a soft little thing like her should shrink from a great rough man like me."

He stooped and picked up his gun, when the dog uttered a low whine.

"Eh, Bess, my lass, what's the matter wi' thee? Not been hevving dreams like thy master, and thinking things is going to happen, eh?"

The dog leaped up and laid her paws upon his broad chest, whined again, and looked up at him wistfully.

"Down, owd lass. Theer, come along and let's fetch Dick and Prince. There's work for thee to-day as'll keep thee from wanting to scrotch that heap. Come along."

He walked towards his lodge, with his head bent and brow full of lines, talking now and then to himself.

"Nay, I mun keep the secret," he said. "I mun keep it for the maister's sake. It would kill him if he was to know."

"I don't feel the man I was," he said. "I seem to know too much, and I'm most bet out wi' thinking sometimes what would happen if it was all to come to light."

"Phew!" he whistled, wiping his face, and looking haggard and strange. "I wouldn't care if I could feel as her ladyship didn't know. Sometimes I think she don't; sometimes I think she do, for she's always so kind and gentle to Miss Judith, and you can see in her eyes that she's sorry for her, and looks at her as if she were scared, for fear she might find something out. Eh, but it's a bad affair! and if it weern't for Milly, and my being like at home and in my old place, and Sir Harry the best o' maisters, I'd go."

He crossed the Brackley road, and plunged in among the firs, the dog running here and there, but never stirring far from her master's heels.

"Eh, poor Miss Judith, it would send her crazy if I weer to mak' a clean breast of it and—— Ah! but I couldn't do it. Hevn't I said so a hundred times?" he cried, angrily, as he glanced round at an

imaginary speaker. "It would send Miss Judith daft, kill Sir Harry, and I should send the captain to the gallows; and I wouldn't do that to the worst man as ever breathed. What hev you got theer?"

Bess was scratching vigorously amongst the pine-needles, and whining as she turned her muzzle towards her master.

"Why, my lass, what is it? Theer, hold hard! Why, it's—it's—why, it's hair!"

Sam Burton stooped and picked up a handful of brown hair, perfectly dry and crisp of curl, but full of fir-needles, and turning the thick bed a little more on one side he found quite a heap.

"That be queer," muttered Sam Burton, as he shook the needles away, and held the curls in the sunlight that came through the branches overhead.

"Well, it be of no use to me," he continued, throwing down the hair, "only I wonder how it came there, and—— Why, it be Mr. Range's sure!"

A curious muddy look came over his sunburned face, and, stooping down, he carefully gathered up the locks, and put them in his handkerchief, which he tied up and placed in the pocket of his shooting-jacket.

He then had a look round, setting the dog to hunt for fresh traces, but in vain; and Sam Burton went on thoughtfully to the lodge in the wood, where the big oak-tree in front was ornamented with a gibbeted collection of weasels, stoats, jays, and hawks, besides a couple of half-wild cats which had taken to a life in the woods with the death of the game.

Burton walked slowly, and at every few yards he took off or pushed back his hat to have a good scratch at his crisp locks, but only to give his head a thoughtful, doubting shake.

CHAPTER XLIV.

BESS RETALIATES.

SAM BURTON made but a poor breakfast, for he had more than Milly upon his mind, and, shouldering his gun, he took down a couple of dog-collars and leathern thongs, went round to the back where the other dogs were standing upon their hind legs behind the fenced-in kennel; and a retriever and another setter were soon taken prisoners, to begin tugging at the thongs, till a short whip was taken from the keeper's pocket, cracked and replaced, when they became a little less demonstrative, and settled down into a walk.

Just then a stoutly-built lad came trotting up, with his mouth full of bread-and-butter and a slice in his hand, ready to take the thongs, and Burton started back to the Priory, where he had hardly reached the door when the gentlemen came out from breakfast.

"Morning, Sam!" cried Sir Harry. "Ah, Bess, old girl! Hey, Juno! Well, Gyp!" and, amidst a chorus of frantic barkings and whinings, the General patted the dogs.

"Splendid morning for us, Burton."

"Yes, Sir Robert, and birds be very plentiful. Mornin', sir."

This last, in spite of himself, was a sullen salutation to Carleigh as he came to the door with Judith and Lady Fanshaw, both quiet and grave of manner, while Carleigh seemed to be in the highest of spirits as he greeted the keeper.

He looked well in his leaf-brown shooting-suit, and soft hat to match nattily ornamented with a squirrel's tail; while the brothers, with their grey hair and moustache, were in brown velvetene, both erect and manly-looking, and ready for any number of miles' walk that day.

"Have you plenty of cartridges, Sam?" said Sir Harry.

"Yes, Sir Harry, both of us have a pretty good lot, and Tom here can easily run for a few more if we are getting short."

Then there was a final adjustment of belts and examination of guns, with the dogs fidgeting and anxious to be off.

"I've seen some very strong coveys, Burton," said Carleigh, smiling.

"Yes, sir, there's plenty of birds," said the keeper, coldly.

"Well, hang it, man," cried Carleigh, laughing, "don't talk in that tone. I mean to have a few brace if you'll show us any sport."

"Oh, I'll show you plenty, sir," said the keeper, in the same constrained manner—a manner that changed as his master asked him a question or two, or Sir Robert invited his opinion about his gun, when Burton was full of eager deference and respect.

"Well, Judy, you'll come and bring us some lunch?" cried Sir Robert.

"Oh, yes, uncle, dear!" she said, as she placed her hands in his. "I hope you'll enjoy your morning."

"Never fear, my dear," said Sir Robert, heartily. Then, in a whisper, as they stood a little on one side: "but I should enjoy it ten times as much if I could see a little bit of sunshine in my pet's face."

"Oh, you shall, uncle," she cried, smiling up at him; but it was a pale, sickly smile.

"And we shall see you about one with the lunch?"

"Yes, uncle, and your pipe. Now don't tire yourself too much. Wouldn't you like a puggree?"

"What, for a sun like this! Pooh, my dear: nonsense!"

Carleigh was busy patting the dogs, and laughing as he talked to them, while Sir Harry was bidding good-bye to Lady Fanshaw, who seemed day by day to grow larger-eyed and more thin.

Somehow the dogs did not seem to take to Carleigh, but he laughed it off. When trying to play with Bess's ears the setter uttered a low growl that made him snatch his hand away, and then frown, as he glanced round to see if he was observed.

"A little snappish, Burton," he said, laughing.

"Yes, sir. She hev her likes and dislikes, same as human beings has," replied the keeper. "I wouldn't touch her, sir, if I was you. She might snap."

"Oh, pooh! rubbish!" cried Carleigh. "Bess knows me, don't you, old girl? Good old dog then!"

He started back, white as ashes, for the long hair rose round the dog's neck, and with an angry snarl she displayed her white teeth, muttering low as she withdrew behind the keeper.

"Why, Burton, how's this?" cried Sir Harry, warmly. "The dog must be ill. She's not safe. You had better take her back. Why, Bess?"

With every trace of anger gone, the beautiful animal, on hearing Sir Harry's voice, set up her ears, and, waving her great silky plume-like tail from side to side, ran to him, and began to whine and fawn about him, ending by thrusting her nose into his hand.

"Why, Bess, you gipsy, what does all this mean?"

The dog bent over against his leg, and looked up, literally smiling with her soft liquid eyes.

"She seems right enough now, Burton. Why, what's the matter with her?"

Burton shook his head. He dare not glance at Carleigh.

"Dogs be queer beasts, Sir Harry. There's no accounting for 'em; but I think she be all right. P'r'aps it's that squirl's tail in the captain's hat."

"Oh, nonsense! Here, George, come and pat her!"

Carleigh felt as if he would rather have headed a forlorn hope; but, mastering himself as the horror of hydrophobia ran through his brain, he advanced, smiling, to pat the animal.

The effect was magical. The dog seemed as if she had been galvanised, for, springing into a rigid attitude before her master, the long silky hair rose up again about her neck, and she burst into a furious bay, seeming ready to spring at the captain's throat if he approached another step.

He stopped short, still smiling, while Sir Robert and Judith looked on, and Lady Fanshaw, who was deadly pale, stood with her hands clasped before her, fascinated by the scene.

"Give me your whip, Burton!" cried Sir Harry, his eyes flashing and his old soldierly bearing setting him up stiff, and frowning as if he were about to quell some mutiny in his brigade.

Burton glanced at Bess, and a sigh escaped him as he reluctantly thrust his hand in his pocket.

"I think p'r'aps she be a bit wrong, Sir Harry," he said, apologetically. "I'll tak' and chain her up."

"Give me that whip!" cried Sir Harry, in stern, commanding tones that brooked no refusal, and, looking pityingly at his favourite the while, Burton touched his hat and reluctantly handed the heavy dog-whip to his master.

"I beg pardon, Sir Harry," he said, "she be put out. I wouldn't beat her. She might fly at you."

"Stand back, sir!" cried Sir Harry, fiercely; and Lady Fanshaw turned faint, and a strange thrill of fear ran through Carleigh as he saw what the fine old man before him could be when roused.

"Carleigh—George!" he cried, as if giving an order for a charge, "come and pat this dog!"

Bess was in front of her master as if defending him, and Carleigh took another step forward.

It seemed to madden poor Bess, who barked again savagely and gathered herself up to spring, when *crack, crack, crack* came three sharp cuts upon her flanks, and the dog uttered three shrill cries, leaping round and crouching at Sir Harry's feet, grovelling along upon the ground till she laid her head upon one of his boots, and whined and cried piteously, almost like a child.

"How dare you!" cried Sir Harry, placing one foot upon the dog's neck, when she lay over on her side, and looked up at him reproachfully. "Now get up!"

The dog sprang to her feet and looked up as if for further orders.

"Now come here and beg the captain's pardon!" cried Sir Harry, seizing Bess by the ear and leading her forward.

With a furious shake of the head she freed herself, and broke into another savage burst of barking as Carleigh raised his hand, smiling, but vowing death and destruction to the dog.

"Down!" roared Sir Harry, and he had raised the whip again to strike, when Judith caught his arm.

"Don't! Please, uncle, don't!" she cried, piteously. "It cuts me too!"

"Pardoned!" said Sir Harry. "I wouldn't have beaten her, my dear; but she must not behave like that."

"Poor Bess—poor darling old Bess!" cried Judith, sinking on her knees on the gravel-path to put her arms round the dog's neck, the tears running down her cheeks the while. "There, there, then! Good old doggie. Now come with me."

She sprang up, and Bess, who had laid her head upon her shoulder, with her thin red tongue lolling out, bounded round her barking with delight; but as Judith took her by the ear and tried to coax her towards the captain there was a repetition of the former scene, and Carleigh said, cavalierly—

"Oh! never mind, sir. She'll get over it when we're in the fields."

"I don't like to be beaten," cried Sir Harry, sharply, and his grey moustache seemed to twitch.

"No, we don't, Harry," said Sir Robert. "George Carleigh has been beating the dog, I suppose."

"Really, no!" cried Carleigh. "I have not touched her."

"I've beaten her, but she never resents that; does she, Sam?"

"No, Sir Harry, never. I often used to thrash her when she was young."

"Come here, Bess! There," cried Sir Harry, as the dog ran up wagging her tail, "she bears no malice. You try her, Bob."

"Here, Bess!"

The dog ran to Sir Robert, sprang up, and laid her paws upon his chest.

"Quiet enough with me."

"Call her, my dear," said Sir Harry.

Lady Fanshaw made a desperate effort to master the faintness that oppressed her, and called the dog.

Bess went to her but slowly, without any of her previous manifestations of pleasure, and involuntarily Sir Harry cocked his gun, the "click, click" sounding loudly in the morning air.

If the dog had sprung at his wife—at the idol of his heart—he would have shot her dead, and he turned pale as he watched what took place.

It was a strange group; for every one present in front of the ivy-grown old building seemed to have been turned to stone. Judith clung to her uncle; Carleigh bit his nether lip and gazed at the dog with contracted eyes; and Burton had started forward as he saw Sir Harry's action, and then, bound by long discipline, stopped short.

But there was no cause for fear.

Bess went slowly forward with lowered tail, looking wistfully up at Lady Fanshaw; and as she stretched out one white hand the dog licked it gently and lay down at her feet.

"There, that will do," cried Sir Robert. "Come along. Don't talk to her, George. I know what it is," he said, smiling; "he has been giving her cigar-ends hot to eat."

"We had better leave her behind," said Sir Harry.

"No, no! She'll be right enough if George leaves her alone. Bess is a woman dog. You want her to do something, and she says she won't, and when a woman says she won't, she won't; will she, Judy?"

"No, uncle, never," cried Judith, and by accident she glanced at Carleigh and their eyes met.

"Well, we are wasting time!" said Sir Harry. "Forward there!"

"All right!" cried Sir Robert. "Coming to the gate with us, Judy? Why, Sam, you must teach that dog better manners."

"Very sorry, Sir Robert," said Burton, huskily. "I'll try."

"She is generally so good, Sam," said Judith.

"She be, miss, and thank you kindly, miss, for taking her part; I think a deal o' she."

Burton and the lad went forward with the dogs, and Sir Robert said to himself—

"I'm afraid I'm a very suspicious old brute."

"Quite a scene!" said a voice that made him start, and Carleigh joined them.

"I'm going back now, uncle," said Judith, suddenly. "I shall see you soon. Good-bye."

She kissed him, and ran back to where Sir Harry was standing, with his wife's hand in his, gazing fondly down at her, while her eyes were fixed on his with a timid, pleading look, so full of reverence and love that the old man felt as if he could hardly tear himself away.

"Good-bye, my own!" he said, kissing her hand tenderly. "Be in good time! Good-bye, Judy!"

"I don't think I shall kiss you," said Judith, pouting. "I can feel the strokes of that cruel whip all round me now."

She gave herself a writhe, half playful, half serious.

"And I took the part of and defended your betrothed," said Sir Harry, catching her by the arm.

"George must have done something very wicked and cruel," said Judith, pettishly, "or Bess would never have flown at him like that."

"Ah!" said Sir Harry, gravely, "you must learn to think a little better of George, my dear. There, I must be off. Good-bye, my dears, good-bye."

The General strode off after the others, his gun under his arm, and just then a gun-barrel flashed a hundred yards away, and Carleigh turned and waved his hand, waiting for Sir Harry to join him.

Lady Fanshaw was trembling; for a horrible thought had suddenly crossed her troubled mind.

Those two were going out together carrying guns. Suppose——

She dared not think it out, but shrank into the house trembling; and, as Judith passed an arm round her, she shuddered as she thought of the horrors of that night. To crush the witness of that love-scene she believed that Carleigh had slain a man—the lover of the poor girl at her side. Would such a one as he scruple to proceed further to gain his ends, and perhaps by accident remove the obstacle in his path?

The thought was so terrible that she felt as if she must rush out after them and stand beside Sir Harry all the day, to shield him with her own bosom if needs be; and it was only by a strong effort that she was able to calm herself and talk to Judith about the scene that had taken place with the dog.

Lady Fanshaw would have avoided the subject, but Judith insisted on returning to it, and at last, as they were sitting together thinking it would soon be time for the pony carriage to be brought round, Judith exclaimed, looking fixedly in her cousin's eyes——

"I'm so glad, Alice dear, that you are not so warm to George Carleigh as you used to be."

"Judith!" cried Lady Fanshaw.

"Don't be angry with me for speaking plainly. I am glad, for I don't like George at all."

"Oh, Judy dear, be still."

"Yes, I will directly; but I was going to say Bess would not have flown at him if she had not known that he was a very wicked man."

Lady Fanshaw's face was like marble as she met her cousin's eyes. Then, constrained to say something, she exclaimed——

"Absurd! How could a dog know?"

"Dogs have more sense than people think, and—— Good gracious! What's that?"

It was some one running, and on looking out they could see the boy who had led the dogs coming panting down the drive.

Lady Fanshaw rushed to the open window, and Judith hardly recognised the voice in which she hoarsely cried——

"What is it? Speak, boy, what is wrong?"

"One of the grooms—to fetch the doctor," panted the lad. "Captain—shot him dead."

Judith was just in time to catch her cousin as she reeled back from the window, her horrible thoughts having come back like an endorsement of the terrible announcement; and as she subsided in Judith's arms she moaned forth—

"God help me now! What shall I do?"

CHAPTER XLV.

A PITCHED BATTLE.

PANNELL's shout roused his confederates to action, for the pair had exchanged glances and hesitated.

"Do you hear?" cried Pannell, more sternly, as he proved his value to his party in pluck and strength where he was wanting in brains.

"Stand back, John Pannell," cried Range, catching up a chair and whirling it above his head. "Stand back, or I shall do you a mischief."

"Do it," said Pannell, coolly.

Mewburn drew a short staff from his pocket, and Sheldrake caught a pillow from the bed—an absurd weapon of offence; but he knew what he was about.

"Put down that chair," cried Pannell.

"Look here," shouted Range, "I don't want to injure you, John Pannell, but if you come a step further I'll break your head."

"Do it," said the latter again, and without hesitation he advanced.

Range made a tremendous blow at him with the chair, but at the same moment, just as his attention was taken up by his most active assailant, Sheldrake hurled the pillow and struck him full in the face, Pannell dashed at and grappled with him, and Mewburn leaped at him from behind, and seized his legs.

A tremendous struggle ensued, during which the four men seemed to be knitted into one writhing heaving mass. They swayed here and they swayed there; the table was upset with a crash; and, amidst the sound of hoarse panting and inarticulate cries uttered by the prisoner, the bed creaked as if it were about to collapse, Pannell having thrown himself forward with all his strength, bearing back Range, who fell with the weight of the giant upon him, heavy enough to break in his ribs.

"Oh! oh! Help! help!" shrieked a voice.

"Here, I'll hold him; I can now," growled Pannell. "Pull that fool out of the way."

"That fool" was Mewburn, who was tightly pinioned beneath the legs of the contending men.

Sheldrake extricated him, and he stood feeling himself all over, swearing viciously.

"He nearly broke my back," he cried. "I'm very much hurt."

Then, as if seized by a malicious desire to retaliate, he ran and picked up the little staff he had dropped, avoided Sheldrake's

attempt to detain him, and struck the prisoner two vicious blows on one leg.

His arm was raised to strike a third, but with one vigorous kick in the ribs Range sent him staggering back, and then, unable to save himself, the ruffian came down in a sitting position upon the floor.

Pannell smiled grimly, and, now that the prisoner was helpless, Sheldrake laughed outright.

"There, you may as well give in, Range, old man," growled Pannell, holding his captive down easily.

"When I am breathless," was the reply; and Range continued to struggle fiercely.

"Oh! very well then; if you're hurt it isn't my fault. Here, don't sit there, Nathan; come and hold his legs. Now then, Frank, hand me that waistcoat. That's it. Come, Arthur, my lad, it's of no use to show fight; you may as well give in. We're three to one, and I've double your strength."

"Cowards!" panted Range, as he struggled with all his might; but he had Pannell's whole weight upon him, and, in spite of his efforts, the latter, with Sheldrake's help, forced the strait-waistcoat on; then first one arm was crippled, and then the other, Mewburn and Sheldrake each seizing a sleeve, and holding it down on either side of the bed, with Range's arm stretched out.

This done, Pannell rose and threw one of the big straps right across the prisoner's waist, dragging it tight, and buckling it rapidly.

"I'm done for this time," thought Range; and as he lay stretched upon his back his starting eyes fell upon the big cobweb up in the corner by the ceiling, where the spider was busily pinioning a large fly which was making a fight for liberty and life, and it all seemed applicable to his own case as he felt himself thrust and dragged into the middle of the bed, while a couple more straps were thrown over him and secured.

Next the sleeves of the waistcoat were fastened to the sides of the frame, and Range lay perfectly helpless, his face flushed, his eyes blood-shot, and his chest heaving with the excitement and exertion.

"Didn't want to hurt you, my lad," said Pannell, quietly; "but it had to be done."

"I'll be even with you for this," said Mewburn, menacingly, as he thrust the staff into his pocket and arranged his ruffled clothes.

"No, no, my dear doctor, you don't mean that!" cried Sheldrake. "You must not give him a stronger dose on account of this paroxysm! He'll be better now."

"Just like his spite," thought Range, who heard all this, but felt his gaze fascinated by the actions of the spider in the corner. "Now he's going to suck his blood."

There was silence in the room just then, and a faint, piteous, humming noise came from the corner. Range shuddered, for he knew that the spider had just thrust its poisonous jaws into the wretched fly's side.

"But they are not going to suck my blood—my money," he said

to himself; and his eyes then met those of Pannell, whom he expected to see looking fiercely at him.

On the contrary, John Pannell was perfectly calm and unruffled, giving him, instead of a scowl, quite a friendly nod.

"You're pretty strong," he said coolly. "Better wait a bit, hadn't we?" he continued, throwing the quilt neatly over Range, and turning to Sheldrake, who was putting straight the overturned table and chair.

"Wait? no; it does not matter. Are you going to give in now, Arthur, and sign the little papers—of course when your hand has grown steady again—say last thing to-night?"

Range turned away his head.

"Ah, well! we won't bother you now," said Sheldrake. "Go and call her in, Jack!"

Pannell nodded, and went to the door, returning at the end of a few minutes with Jane, armed with broom and pail.

"Say a word, Nathan," whispered Sheldrake.

Mewburn frowned, and looked maliciously at the prostrate man, who returned his gaze fiercely. Then, turning to the girl, in a mocking smooth voice he said—

"I would not speak to him, Jane. Do your work, and come away. He has been a little excited, but that is over now. You will not be afraid to do your cleaning?"

"N—n—no," faltered the girl.

"And you remember what I said?"

"Ye—yes, sir."

"Get your work done then! If he seems at all troublesome you can ring the bell."

"Ye—yes, sir; but——"

"You need not be in the slightest degree alarmed, Jane," said Sheldrake, blandly. "My poor brother will be calm now; but even if he were not," he whispered to the girl, "he is so strapped down that he cannot move."

The three men left the room, and as they closed the door Jane seized upon the long strips of carpet, rolled them up, and then began removing the various articles of furniture, preparatory to sweeping the room.

This done, she glanced in a frightened way at Range, caught up the broom and passed it round the ceiling.

Away went Range's spider, but only into a hole, while the partly-sucked fly and the web remained upon the broom.

"Are they listening?" said Range, in a low voice.

"Oh, my gracious!" exclaimed Jane, giving a jump towards the door.

"Don't be foolish, my lass," said Range, in a low voice. "Tell me; are they listening?"

"I—I don't know," said the girl, in a frightened whisper, and holding the broom before her as a weapon to keep him off should he be disposed to make a jump at her, bed and all.

"Go and see," he said.

Jane did not hesitate for a moment, but ran to the door, glad of an excuse to get away; and then once outside she shrank from returning.

But the fierce-looking eyes she had seen upon the bed exercised a fascination over her even outside in the long passage, and she felt constrained to return.

"Well," he said, eagerly, "are they gone?"

"Yes, sir, they're downstairs; and both doors is shet."

"Then we can talk to each other."

"Oh! but please I don't want to talk to you, sir. I've got my work to do."

"Talk and do your work too. Don't be silly. I'm tied down here fast, and you don't suppose I should hurt you?"

"Oh! I don't know, please, sir; mad people is so treacherous."

Jane went on sweeping, with her eyes nearly all the time upon Range, who, now that he was cooling down, could not help feeling annoyed at the terror he inspired.

"Here, Jane!" he cried, suddenly, after a pause; and the girl jumped and struck the skirting-board heavily with her broom.

"Oh, don't, please!"

"You silly girl! What a coward you are! Look here, come and loosen these sleeves, so that I can sit up."

"Not me!" cried the girl.

"Don't be absurd. Come here."

Jane shook her head.

"Taint likely," she cried. "Here, if you keeps looking at me like that and don't be still I'm going to ring the bell for Dr. Parkins."

"No, no! don't do that. Loosen these sleeves; they hold me down too tightly."

"I wouldn't, no, not if you was to fill my lap full of gold. And there, I shan't listen to you. I've got to get my work done."

Here Jane began to rattle her broom about in corners, and made a tremendous dust.

"I'll be still then, only you might talk to me."

"I don't want to talk to you. I'm 'feard on you."

"Afraid of me! Why, do I look so very bad?"

"Horrid!" said the girl, stopping to rest on her broom. "Your hair's cut so short, and you want shaving badly, and you've got such a dreadful look in your eye. I say, why don't you get well! Your young lady would take on if she see you like this."

"My young lady?" said Range, starting so that he made the bed creak and Jane jump towards the bell.

"Do be quiet! Don't you see I'm quite helpless here?"

"But you might break away," faltered Jane.

"Absurd! Tell me what you mean about my young lady."

"Her as you went mad about? I heerd 'em talking about it downstairs."

"Ah!" raged Range; and Jane edged nearer the bell.

"It's all a lie, Jane!" he cried. "Don't you believe it. There isn't a word of truth in it."

"But you have got a young lady, haven't you, sir?"

"No! no! no!" cried Range; "and I'm no more mad than you

are. If you can, you tell anybody you see that I am kept a prisoner here by these people on account of my money."

Jane nodded sagely.

"What do you mean by that?" he cried.

"Now I know you must be just a little mad, sir."

"Why?"

"Because that's just what Mr. Range told me you'd say; and so did missis."

"Oh, confound them!" ejaculated Range, making the bed creak again, and causing the girl to hold out her broom once more as a protection, till, seeing how helpless he was, she went on busily with her work, and the prisoner lay thinking.

"What a state I am in," he said to himself, "to be so eager to make friends with yon poor simple wench; but I do feel so lonely, and as if it would give me fortitude to have something to look forward to, even if it is only the sympathy of a woman like this."

"There," said Jane, at last, as she took a duster from her apron-string and began replacing and dusting the various pieces of furniture; "now you begin to look tidy again, and if I was you I would try to get better as soon as I could."

"But, my good girl, I'm not ill."

"Oh, yes, you are! They told me you was, and I can see it for myself. You're so excited like; but I'm not going to be afraid of you any more, if you'll promise not to hurt me if you get loose."

"I would not hurt a hair of your head, Jane."

"Thankye, sir," said the girl, and, giving her head a shake, she proceeded to tighten up a long twist that was escaping from the hair-pins. "Now I must go."

"And you'll come and talk to me sometimes in the next room?"

"Will it make you bad if I do?"

"Bad! no: it will do me good."

"Then I will sometimes, if you'll promise me to try and get better; and then, I say, how glad your young lady will be!"

"I have no young lady, Jane," said Range, quietly.

"Are you sure, sir?"

"Yes, quite sure."

"Oh! there, I can't stop talking here all day. Your place is tidy now, and here they come."

Jane made a dart at the chimney-piece, sweeping the little ornaments on one side, and busily dusting, as steps were heard; and directly after Sheldrake and his companions entered the room.

"Done, Jane?" said Sheldrake. "Ah! yes! that's nice and tidy now. I hope my poor brother has been quiet."

"Yes, sir, he's been lying as still as a lamb, sir," replied Jane, giving a finishing touch to the mantel-piece before catching up the broom and brushes and hurrying out of the room.

"Yes; nice and calm now," said Mewburn, with a mocking smile. "I think we might get him ready to see the visitor, eh?"

Sheldrake glanced at the prisoner, and nodded. Then, turning to the other two, they talked together in a low voice, while the blood seemed to rush to Range's head.

A visitor! Get him ready to see some stranger! What were they going to do? Drug him? Treat him as he had read somewhere of a sane patient being treated, to give him the semblance of madness while he was seen by those who, if they had found him sane, would have had him freed? What did they mean?

The agony he suffered in those few moments was terrible; the veins in his temples throbbed, his muscles swelled, and he began to feel at last that if this suspense went on his enemies would need to do very little to throw him off his balance.

Yes; he was sure of it. The wretches were about to treat him in the same way as that unfortunate patient; and in a few moments he believed that he should be lying raving there, and sooner than this had he not better give up everything he owned?

No; that would be too great a triumph for them, and they should do their worst.

"I'd sooner die—yes, even mad—than let these scoundrels win such a victory."

He had worked himself up to this pitch when his blood seemed suddenly to leave his head, where it had throbbed and burned him, to leave him chilled and pale, for just then Mewburn thrust one hand into his breast-pocket and advanced to the bedside with a malicious smile.

CHAPTER XLVI.

KNOCKING AWAY A HOPE.

THERE was all the desire to take advantage of Range's helpless position, and retaliate cruelly, in Mewburn's heart; but he was only a part of the confederation, and as the carrying out of such designs as he had in his head would have been injurious to the prospects of the party, including himself; and as, moreover, his companions were present, and would not have permitted outrage, Range's fears were needless, and the visitor was not going to see him in a state of stupor, or of raving madness.

Mewburn only came and bent over him with a smile, and made a profession of feeling pulse and temple.

"Yes, he is quite calm now."

"Fetch him up then, my dear John," said Sheldrake.

"Why don't you do it yourself?" remonstrated Pannell. "You can, you know."

"My dear brother John, this is administrative not executive. The duty you impose is not clerical, and I do not care to undertake it. Besides, what does it matter? If poor Arthur here does begin chattering, well, he does. There, there! leave these matters to me."

Range lay motionless, and gazing straight up at the ceiling, forcing

himself to be perfectly calm, but with his brain working hard to find out the intentions of his tormentors.

Pannell left the room without a word, and his confederates sat chatting quietly, till once more steps were heard, and Sheldrake smiled as he saw the rapid glance Range darted at the opening door.

The latter noted the smile, and bit his lip, for he felt that he had been guilty of a display of weakness; but his attention was taken up by the appearance of the new-comer—a little, smoothly-shaven man, with white face and two black eyes that would suggest currants in an unbaked cake.

He was no doctor, for he entered unrolling a white apron, and, bowing to all in turn with an obsequious "Good morning," and a remark or two about the weather, then a request for some hot water, which, by Sheldrake's foresight, was already waiting on the washstand.

"Why, he's a barber!" said Range to himself, with a sigh of relief; and he lay watching the man, who glanced at him inquiringly, and then at Mewburn, and lastly at Sheldrake.

"My brother is much better this morning, Mr. Gentles," said the latter. "This is Mr. Gentles, Arthur, old fellow," he continued. "You'll be more comfortable after a good shave."

Range did not reply.

"If he—could be—a little more hup, sir," said Mr. Gentles.

"Oh, to be sure," said Sheldrake. "Jack, old fellow, he might sit up now, I think. You'd like to sit up, wouldn't you?"

Range made no reply, and Pannell and Sheldrake each began to unfasten a sleeve, while the barber edged towards Mewburn, and, while stopping a razor, whispered something about "making a dash at it, you know."

"Oh, no! No fear!" said Mewburn. "You feel quite calm now?"

Range had it in his heart to fly out at the speaker; but he felt that he would best serve his turn by being quiet. The time for escape had not yet arrived, so he quietly nodded. The barber seemed satisfied, and approached the bed-side, where the patient, as he termed him, was sitting up, the sleeves of the waistcoat having been fully loosened for the purpose.

The three confederates, to Range's great astonishment, drew away to one of the windows, and left him in the barber's hands, the man beginning to chatter, after the fashion of his trade, as he frothed up the lather with his brush.

"Nice morning for a drive for you, sir—that's it, sir—mouth shut, please, sir! Time you was shaved, sir. That's the way. Not too hot, eh? That's right."

Range replied with nods and negative motions while the soap was well rubbed in, and remained perfectly passive as every scrap of a tolerably long stubble was removed most dexterously from his cheeks, lip, and chin.

"This razor hurt you, sir? No? That's right. Quite a new one, sir; German make. Sounds raspy, for your beard's a bit wiry, sir. That's right. There! Quite refreshing, ain't it, sir?"

He chattered away, sponging off the remains of the lather and dabbing his client's chin with a soft towel as he finished. Then, turning to Sheldrake—

"I think you said the head too, sir?"

"Yes, yes, of course!" was the reply.

"Stop!" cried Range, angrily. "I will not submit to this!"

The barber started back as if he had been shot, but the little party by the window did not stir. Sheldrake alone spoke.

"Now, my dear Arthur," he said blandly, "don't be so foolish. You know Dr. Parkins wishes it. See how comfortable and cool you have been since your hair was all cut off."

"I say I will not submit to this!" cried Range.

"Nonsense, my dear boy! You can have a wig, or a little velvet cap, if you like. There, there! don't be obstinate, old fellow, pray!"

"It will not take many minutes, sir, I assure you," said the barber, deprecatingly. "I shall not hurt you, and I'm sure you'll feel all the better."

"Oh, Arthur, old fellow!" said Sheldrake, in a kindly, reproachful tone.

Range hesitated. They would force him, he knew, if he resisted; and then there would be a scene, and the barber would go away fully convinced that he had been operating upon a dangerous lunatic. Besides, what did it matter? His hair was closely cut now to the skin; the stubble might just as well be removed.

"It's all right, Mr. Gentles," said Sheldrake, nodding and smiling at his victim; and Range gave way, submitting to the miserable indignity to the very end.

But he could talk now without danger of being cut, and he said quietly to the barber—

"You will leave here as soon as you have finished shaving me?"

"Yes, sir, to be sure, sir, and I hope to come again often. That's it, sir—there, it doesn't hurt a bit, does it?"

"No. Now listen to me. I wish you to bear witness that I am a gentleman confined here by these scoundrels."

He kept his eyes on the group as he spoke, but no one moved.

"For the sake of money. They keep me here a prisoner."

"Do they, sir?—one moment, please. I haven't quite done that side."

"They wish me to pay them a large sum for my release, and they keep me shut up under the pretence that I am mad."

"Disgraceful, sir!" said the barber, calmly shaving away, and removing long patches of lather at every stroke.

"Yes, it is disgraceful," continued Range, quietly; "and I ask you, as soon as you are out of this house, no matter what they may say, to go straight to the police-station and give information of my position."

"How's he getting on, Arthur, old fellow?" said Sheldrake, coolly.

"Ah! I'm sure you'll be much more comfortable."

"Oh, yes!" said Mewburn. "One can apply cold-water bandages to your head so much more easily, and have it bathed so nicely."

"Listen to me," said Range. "They are only speaking to throw you off the scent. They have told you I am mad, I suppose?"

"Mad?" said the barber, laughing. "Oh, dear me, no, sir! Mad! Why, what put that in your head, sir? Hold still, sir, please—forehead a little more down."

"I believe they have told you I am mad, but I am as sane as you are, Mr. Gentles."

"To be sure you are, sir. Any one could see that at a glance. That's better. Now we shall do it."

"I tell you I am perfectly sane, and I beg that you will get me help. You shall be rewarded to any extent you like. Get me help and free of these men, and you shall name your own reward."

"Thank ye, sir. Very kind of you, I'm sure," said the man, scraping away.

"They did tell you I was mad?"

"Mad, sir? Oh, dear no!" he replied. "They said you'd been ill—nasty brain fever, and that sort of thing; but mad, sir? Lor' bless your 'art, what would be the use of them telling me that, when I could see with half an eye, and hear with half an ear, that you are as right as ninepence? There, sir, now you're as smooth and comfortable as a gent need wish to be. Ah! sir, it's a pity the old custom don't come in again of gents keeping their heads shaved, and always wearing wigs. It's a nice clean way of keeping the head, sir, and good for trade; and now you've took to it once, sir, I prophesy as you'll never leave it off again."

"Will you deliver my message at the police-station, my good fellow?"

"Message, sir? What about? Your being kept shut up here?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Range, eagerly. "You need not feel afraid of these men. They dare not resent it. Go at once."

"Certainly, sir. To be sure I will. Anything to oblige a customer, sir. Good morning, sir, good morning; and if any one tells me that you're mad I shall know what to say."

The little man backed towards the door, followed by Sheldrake, whose hand was in his pocket, and then, as the door closed, Range let himself sink back and closed his eyes.

Pannell and Mewburn were in the room, but their backs were towards him, and they were talking in a low voice, so that the prisoner was able to muse for some minutes without interruption, and this he did with his heart sinking lower and lower, and a dull sense of despair overshadowing him.

It was plain enough: he had been branded mad, and every one would believe it. The barber had calmly listened to his words with his mind made up. In the little fellow's eyes he was a fierce lunatic, with half-lucid intervals, and all the time the shaving was going on the little plausible fool had been playing Polonius to his Hamlet, fooling him to the top of his bent.

Police-station! Information! He would pocket his fee, and, without word of warning from Sheldrake, go back to his shop and

chatter to every fresh customer about the young mad gentleman up at the Red House, and how good and patient his friends and the doctor were with him.

And they had him at an advantage; but if they thought they were going to win they were mistaken. His position was enough to drive him mad, but he would escape and set them at defiance yet.

Just then Sheldrake re-entered the room, smiling blandly.

"Ah! my dear boy, how much more cool and comfortable you must feel! What do you say now to a little game at cards?—without cards, you know. This seems to me to be a favourable opportunity for settling up that little affair of ours. No hurry, my dear boy; but you are so much better now that it is a pity to keep yourself back from having a change. Come, what do you say? Will you write to your agents, and have that trifle settled on us at once?"

Range's face became fixed and hard as he looked full in Sheldrake's eyes.

"Oh! just as you like, my dear boy; there is no hurry. I only named it now because I fancied I observed that one idea of yours was knocked away—a fancy that you had only to speak to make any number of people believe that you were quite right—a proof this to me of your insanity."

"You scoundrel!" roared his victim; "if you and I were on fair terms somewhere together, I believe I should kill you. Give up? Never! You shall not touch a penny of my money. I know all your plans, and I'll fight it out and defy you. Yes; give me the chance, and I believe I should kill you, and feel that I was doing a good act."

"Oh, doctor, doctor!" said Sheldrake; "this is very sad. I'm afraid you will have to try your lowering plan!"

"No, no!" interposed Pannell. "Give him time and he'll think better of it by-and-by."

Range glanced at the big fellow half wonderingly. Something had evidently been discussed between them, to which, whatever it was, Pannell objected; and there was an honest ring in the man's voice—an earnestness in his manner—that was very genuine.

"Ah, well! we'll see," said Sheldrake, smiling; "we'll see. I only thought it would be so much better for our dear brother to take his dose of medicine at once. As he will have to swallow it, I felt that it would save him pain and trouble to get it over; but there is no hurry—no hurry. Fasten those sleeves, Jack!" and he moved towards the door.

"Going to leave him like that?" said Pannell, nodding his big head towards the bed, and then stroking and fidgeting his beard about in an uneasy way.

"Do him good," said Mewburn quickly.

"Do you think so, doctor?" said Sheldrake. "Oh, I think you might let him off and give him a bit of exercise."

"Oh, yes! What's the good of tying him up like that?" cried Pannell.

"Just as you like," said Mewburn, glancing involuntarily at the windows and doors.

Pannell waited to hear no more, but unfastened the various bands, slipped off the waistcoat, and, as soon as this was done, the party left the room.

CHAPTER XLVII.

CARLEIGH TRIES THE CHILLED SHOT.

CARLEIGH wisely refrained from taking further notice of the dog, and Bess was soon too much interested in the search for coveys out in the open to pay more heed to him. Like her master, she was tolerant of his presence, but she could not be friends.

The morning was glorious. The sun had not yet mastered the vapours that veiled the valleys here and there; but out in the open it was rapidly drying the pearl-hung spiders' webs, and drinking the glistening iridescent dew that spangled every strand. There was an elasticity in the air that was delightful, and, as they entered the first turnip-field, where the broad-spreading leaves that brushed their boots were dazzling in their sheen, as if frosted with gems, Sir Robert exclaimed—

"There, thank goodness I'm an Englishman and at home. You can't see a sight like that at the Cape, Master George."

"No, indeed, sir."

"Well, look out, my lad, you'll have a chance to try your chilled shot that you were bragging about. I'm content with the old-fashioned corns."

"But they are very penetrating, sir, and——"

Bang! bang! and then Bang! bang!

Carleigh and Sir Harry had both fired as the first covey rose with a tremendous whirr close to their feet, and their birds fell and were retrieved.

"Good beginning!" cried Sir Robert, as the party stopped to watch the rest of the covey, till the birds ceased their whirring flight, and, ending in a long skim, dropped in a clover-field some two hundred yards away.

"Your turn next, Bob!" cried Sir Harry, as they separated and trudged on through the turnips, till the setters started a fresh covey; and this time Sir Robert had a shot and missed.

"Eyes going, Harry!" he shouted.

"Stuff!" was the reply, and on they all went with more or less success for the next hour and a half, when, the estate on one side of the woods having been pretty well gone over, it was settled to cross through a dense piece of coppice to the fields upon the other.

It was a patch of a few acres extent, all young wood that had sprung up after the woodman's axe had been busy cutting poles and faggots, and in the low underwood several coveys were known to have taken refuge.

"Beg pardon, Sir Harry, but it will be strange and bad shooting

in the copse. If we walk it through and beat it like we shall send the birds into the corn stubble lower down."

"Quite right, Burton," exclaimed Sir Harry. "You, Bob, take the right, I'll take the left. You light infantry with Burton search through the middle. I would not fire, George."

"No: all right!" cried Carleigh; and, after arranging their little force as above, the dogs were sent in and Carleigh took the middle, with the boy, who held the retrievers back, on his left and the keeper on his right.

The open patches were here and there interwoven with brambles, and these and the dense growth made the walking very laborious; while, to make it worse, the ground was cut up into deep hollows and gullies with masses of stone every here and there to trip up the unwary who did not watch his feet.

Before they had gone many yards there was the whirr of one covey, and then of another directly after as they walked the birds up and sent them skimming out of the wood towards the open, where there was a chance of seeing them later on.

A low whistle uttered from time to time ran backwards and forwards along the line, uttered by each of the party to show his whereabouts; and in this way, roughly keeping their distances, they had about half crossed the coppice where it was wildest, most rugged, and full of brambles, whose tough shoots caught in trousers and leggings, and scratched the boots.

Then up went another covey, a large one evidently by the whirr and whistle of the wings.

"How are you getting on?" shouted Sir Harry.

"Capitally!" cried Sir Robert from the extreme right.

"Rough walking!" shouted Carleigh. At that moment a solitary bird flew up followed by another; and then there was the report of a gun, a rushing scrambling noise, and a wild shriek as of a man in mortal agony, and, lastly, utter silence for a moment or two.

Then came the loud rustling of twigs and leaves being beaten aside, as if people were forcing their way over from right and left.

"George, where are you? For heaven's sake what's the matter?" cried Sir Harry.

"Here, where are you?" shouted Sir Robert. "Hi! Burton! Carleigh! what's wrong?"

"Here, boy!" panted Sir Harry, coming up to where the lad stood, white and scared, with one dog tugging at the leather thong. "What is it?"

"Some 'un shot off his goon," cried the boy.

"But who—who—where are they?"

"That awa-aya," whimpered the boy. "I see the smook go oop over theer."

"This way, Bob," shouted Sir Harry, and the thick growth rustled and crackled as the brothers forced their way onward towards where a fresh rustling began; and together they came upon Carleigh, struggling up, gun in hand, from a ditch-like rift half concealed by

brambles. He was hatless and his face was pale, save where it was covered with blood, which trickled down and was smeared across one cheek, while his hands were scratched and cut, especially the one that still held his gun.

"My dear boy," cried Sir Harry, "you are hurt. How came Burton to fire?"

"Burton!" said Carleigh in a dreamy way, as he held his hand to his head and stared at Sir Harry as if half stunned. "No, it was my gun that went off. I caught my foot and pitched in there—my head is hurt."

Sir Harry glanced at his brother, who looked back in a horrified manner, as just then a piteous howl rose from the bushes a few yards away.

"I—I'm afraid, my boy—you've hit one of the dogs," faltered Sir Harry.

"That be Bess yowling," cried the boy, running in amongst the bushes, with Sir Harry close at his heels, Sir Robert and Carleigh following, the party coming directly after upon the body of the keeper lying face downwards in the dense undergrowth, his arms extended and his gun beneath him, while with her fore-paws upon her master's back the great dog was scratching at him and howling dismally.

"I'd have given all I have sooner than this should have happened," cried Sir Harry.

As he spoke he threw down his gun, dropped upon his knees, and pressed the leaves and twigs aside.

"Right through the shoulder," continued Sir Harry. "Handkerchiefs, both of you, or he'll bleed to death."

With the readiness of one who had seen many a wound Sir Harry, aided by his no less skilful brother, tore off the velveteen jacket, after slitting it with a knife, and began to plug and stanch the horrible gun-shot wound.

"Boy!" he cried at once, "run back to the house and tell one of the men to gallop off for the doctor. Never mind anything else."

The boy dashed off.

"Oh! George, my lad, this is a sad morning's work," continued Sir Harry. "Don't stand there in that dazed way, boy, but run off for help—labourers, and tell them to bring the first gate they come to."

"Will—he die?" said Carleigh, hoarsely.

"God knows!" replied Sir Harry. "Run."

"That's right, Bob," he continued, as Carleigh threw down his gun and ran off. "A little tighter. He's bleeding terribly; nearly the whole charge gone through. That's better. Now I'll hold him up. Give him a few drops of whisky from your flask. That's the way. Pray God they mayn't be long!"

"I think we've pretty well stanch'd the bleeding," said Sir Robert, who was kneeling down beside the injured man, now supported upon his master's arm and knee.

"Pretty well, Bob; but I'm afraid of an artery. What a horrible misfortune! Hush! he's coming to."

For poor Burton's eyelids quivered, and he uttered a low groan.

At that moment Bess, who had been standing shivering, and looking from one to the other, crept forward to give the keeper's face a lick, and whined dismally, ending with a sharp, angry bark.

"Sam, my lad, take a few drops more of this." The keeper heard Sir Harry's voice, and looked at him in a bewildered manner.

"Drink, my lad. It has been a bad accident, but help is coming, and all will be well."

"Yes, drink, my lad. That's better," cried Sir Robert. "Keep a good heart, my lad, as we soldiers have to do."

"Am I going to die?" said Burton, softly.

"Die? Heaven forbid, Sam, my good fellow!" said Sir Harry. "No, no! We'll pull you through."

"If I'm dying," said Burton, faintly, "I should like to say a word or two, Sir Harry."

"You'd better be silent, my lad," cried Sir Robert.

"Yes, Sir Robert; but a word to my master here. The captain——"

He stopped short, as if a spasm had caught him in the chest, and looked piteously up at Sir Harry.

"No," he moaned, piteously—"good master to me; I could not say a word."

He feebly took hold of the hand that was pressing the handkerchief more tightly to his wound.

"No, you need not speak; I know," said Sir Harry.

"You—know, master?"

"Yes, my lad. It was a horrible misfortune. The captain slipped and fell. That was how it happened."

Sir Robert noticed that a piteous smile came over the poor fellow's face as he heard these words. Then his eyes closed.

"Yes," he said, softly; "that's how it happened. Break gently—poor little Milly—frighten the little—thing—Bess, owd lass—good dog then—good—Ah!"

He seemed to be sinking away, and Sir Robert hastily passed a few more drops of spirit between his lips, when he revived, and looked up once more at his master with a peculiar smile.

"That's how it coom to happen, Sir Harry," he said, softly; and then he lay back, staring straight up at the trees, till there were the sound of voices and the rustling of twigs, as four or five stout labourers came panting up with a gate fresh lifted from its hinges.

Sir Harry stripped off his shooting-jacket for a pillow; Sir Robert followed suit; and these and some corn-rakings from the harvest-field formed a soft bed, on which the poor fellow was lifted; and then four men bore the gate out of the coppice and afterwards raised it to their shoulders, keeping step, and bearing the injured man straight to the Priory, where Lady Fanshaw was going from one wild hysterical fit into another, frightening Judith by her ejaculations and words of self-reproach, till she lay utterly exhausted, and was in that condition when the gate was being borne down the drive.

Sir Harry was the first to reach the house, hatless and coatless, and covered with blood.

Forgetful of his condition, he hurried into the drawing-room, and back into the hall.

"Where is her ladyship?" he cried to the butler.

"In her room, Sir Harry. The blundering boy came and said it was you who were hurt."

"Good heavens!" cried Sir Harry, whose years seemed as if they did not count; and he ran up the stairs with the agility of a young man, and into the bed-room where Lady Fanshaw was lying upon a couch, attended by Judith and her maid, her eyes closed, her face deadly pale.

"Alice! My child! I am here, quite safe!" cried Sir Harry, running to the side of the couch.

There was a wild shriek, and Lady Fanshaw started up, to fling her arms passionately round Sir Harry's neck.

"Thank God! thank God!" she moaned. "They told me you were dead."

"No, no; quite safe!" he cried. "Quite safe, my darling!" he whispered in her ear. "But be a woman—I want your help. Poor Burton is dangerously hurt, and—ah! poor girl! poor girl!"

For as he uttered these last words Milly uttered a wild shriek, and fell backwards as if stricken by a bolt.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"HOW TO SILENCE THE DOGS?"

"THEY could not have contrived stronger chains for me," said Range, as soon as he was alone. "Good heavens! how mad—bah! I must not say that—how savage they make me feel!"

He took a few turns up and down the room, and then went to the window and threw it open.

"Confound the woman!" he exclaimed, drawing back and involuntarily clapping his hands to his bare head; for Sarah Pannell, parasol in hand, was walking up and down the lawn, and on hearing the opening window she had smiled mockingly, and made him a profound courtesy.

"I'm a handsome lover for a lady now," he thought. "What a tangle I've got myself in!"

After a few more strides up and down the room he felt a little calmer, and his thoughts went back direct to the main purpose of his present life—escape; and being alone and free he at once went to the door to examine it, and after a little consideration came to the conclusion that he could do nothing there without tools, for, even if he possessed keys, there were the bolts.

The windows he could not examine now on account of the promenader; but there was the chimney.

Certainly it would not be much of an escape to force his way up

on to the roof, without he could find his way in by some other window and so get down.

It was folly, but all the same he examined the opening to find that, even if it had not been too narrow for his passage, there was a grating strongly fixed across just above the top of the stove.

Satisfied that he could do nothing there, he went to the partition between his room and that of Sheldrake.

This he tapped here and there to find it substantial, and only to be got through by means of strong tools and much noise; so he turned from it and began examining the boards of the floor, turning back the carpet, and looking beneath the bed.

But all were tight, and strongly nailed down. It was an old, well-built house, and the floor-boards fitted closely.

"The window's the way," he said to himself; and, crawling on hands and knees so as not to be visible to any one in the garden, he examined the ends of the iron bars, feeling a little more hopeful as the idea fixed itself upon his brain that by the help of a knife he might loosen and get out the end of one bar, and then his strength would be sufficient to wrench it up and bend it so as to allow passage to his body. The rest, by means of some cord, would be easy.

Satisfied with this, he drew back from the window and sat down to think.

He had hardly seated himself before there was a fluttering of wings, and three or four sparrows alighted to hop about, peering in with their round dark eyes; and in his loneliness the coming of the little creatures made him smile and think of the names he had given them.

For there was long thin Uncle Wash, then the dark-throated captain, and lastly little fair Judith—the tamest and most friendly of them all, she coming right on to the beading of the window-frame, and giving a brisk, cherry chirp or two as she looked at him, first with one eye, then with the other.

There were no crumbs. The birds had been forgotten, so after awhile they took flight; and Range's thoughts flew off, too, down into pleasant Yorkshire, with its high hills and mines and valleys, where the tall chimneys stood festooned with their great plumes of smoke.

"It was a happy time so long as I held my tongue to her," he muttered. "I wonder whether she ever thinks of me, and what she would say if she were to see me now!"

He laughed bitterly, and raised his eyes to the corner of the room where the spider had its net, and there it was again making good, patiently, the web that had been swept away by the broom, ready for some other luckless fly.

"I could kill the little wretch," he said, "only it is its nature, just as I suppose it is Sheldrake's nature to catch flies in webs and suck their blood; but it has not come to that as yet."

He rose and went cautiously to the window, step by step, to see if Sarah Pannell had gone, and she was nowhere in sight; but the bull-dogs were there upon the grass.

"My two enemies!" he muttered, and in imagination he saw himself swinging at the end of a roughly-made rope, with the two fierce beasts baying and leaping up to fix their teeth in his legs.

"That would never do," he muttered again; and just then one of the dogs caught sight of the white smooth head and shaven face, and set up a deep-mouthed bay, which the other followed, staring savagely up at him the while.

"Yes, most decidedly, that would never do," he said, and he shrank away from the window with an impatient gesture, for he became suddenly aware of the fact that Sarah Pannell had been all the time seated behind a great Portugal laurel, book in hand, gazing up at him with a mocking look upon her handsome face.

"I'm beginning to feel as if that woman is going to be the curse of my life," he said to himself. "It's a hard thing to do, but I'll do it. I'm not to blame for it, so why should I be ashamed? It looks pitiful to keep away, so I'll show her I'm no coward, and let her see her work."

Taking a chair, then, he set it by the window and sat down with his arm upon the sill, rested his cheek upon his hand, and gazed out at the brickfield, thinking to himself how much happier the life of those poor fellows was out there, toiling hard, but free to come and go.

As he looked the dogs bayed at him, but gradually calmed down, while Sarah Pannell stared up with a contemptuous look upon her face.

But, like the baying of the dogs, it was lost on Range. He had made up his mind to face it out, and, once he did this, the stubbornness of his nature became manifest—the strength of his will.

While his enemy below stared up vainly, Range's eyes were fixed upon one sturdy, clay-daubed brickmaker, who, after rapidly moulding a number of bricks, suddenly stopped and proceeded to fill and light a clay pipe, sending out tiny puffs of smoke which were quite visible in the clear air.

"Hah!" ejaculated Range; "cigars or a pipe. John Pannell will give me them if I ask him. Shall I, or shall I not?"

It was a trifle to sit musing over, but trifles were now of great importance in Arthur Range's life. He had been annoyed when the web of the spider was destroyed. Not that he cared for spiders, but the proceedings of the insect interested him, and helped to fill up the void in his daily routine.

Then there were the sparrows. Before this he would not have given the chirping, man-loving birds a thought. Now he found them companionable, and himself listening for their notes and the rustle of their wings.

He was not a great smoker, but, shut up there, it seemed to him that tobacco would be one of the greatest solaces he could find. Desire said, *Ask for it*; pride said, *No*.

Pride won.

That day glided by, and Sarah Pannell went in, angry with the anger of a petty mind—annoyed because she had not been able to

irritate the object of her vengeance ; for, as the minutes glided by, the two bull-dogs kept leaping up for a bay at the white figure at the window, and then settled down again to doze. Before they had lain long, the memory of the white face would intrude, and they would leap up again for another bark, one rousing the other. But after a time these barks became a small thundery growl, later on a look, and then they had grown tolerant, and lay still and blinked, while Range sat watching the brickmaker and the great field, seeing there a kind of refuge if he could once cross the wall.

But how to silence the dogs ?

CHAPTER XLIX.

A PETITION FOR A PIN.

RANGE lay strapped down on his bed one morning, calculating how far it was from the window to the garden wall, and turning over an idea that he had in his head.

He had been amusing himself and keeping off unpleasant thoughts by going over the events of a day's fishing, when he had caught trout by means of a floss silk line and artificial fly, floating the fly off like a gossamer spider's web on the light air, the delicate line carrying the barbed bait off to some distance before it dropped upon the surface of the water.

"The very thing !" he said, excitedly. "I can't throw notes outside the wall for want of something to put in them. Crumbs are not heavy enough, and if I put in a bone the cats will take it out. A light note, a long line—the very thing !"

He had hardly conceived this idea when he heard the steps of his gaolers, who came up, followed by Jane, bearing the morning meal.

The girl put down the breakfast as usual, and Sheldrake and Mewburn set their prisoner sufficiently at liberty to sit up and eat.

"Why don't you take these off ?" he said.

"Domestic morning, my dear Arthur. You are to be cleaned up," said Sheldrake, smiling.

Range uttered a contemptuous "pish !" and began his breakfast, while, after exchanging glances with his companions, Sheldrake said—

"Look here, my dear Arthur, we are naturally impatient to see you better, and you have now been under Doctor Parkins's care two months. What do you say to a change ?"

"Change ! What do you mean ?"

"Give up this obstinacy, and let's settle the little matter and have done with it. Now look here, we have been trying generous diet and the kindest of treatment, in the belief that it would be good for your complaint. This morning Doctor Parkins has been saying that change of food might be beneficial—an abstemious bread-and-water diet, and less freedom to the limbs."

"Do what you like," said Range, coldly ; "it will make no difference in me."

"Don't say that, my dear brother. I should be extremely reluctant for the doctor to try what he calls heroic remedies. We have been keeping him back so far—dear John and I—haven't we, John?"

"Yes," said Pannell, quickly. "Look here, Range, old chap, give it up. You wouldn't miss the tin. What's the good of being obstinate?"

Range looked up at him with a dry, half-humorous glance in his eye, and then went on with his breakfast.

"The complaint is very obstinate, doctor," said Sheldrake, with a sigh; "and, dear me! how time goes! He ought to have another visit from Gentles."

The colour came a little into Range's face, and Sheldrake saw it.

"He was so much more cool and comfortable about the head after the last visit. Gentles shall come to-morrow."

The colour deepened as Range thought of the indignity; but he went on, with apparent calm, eating his breakfast, and Sheldrake continued speaking, with his head turned to Mewburn.

"Wait a week, doctor," he said, "and see how he is then. If he is no better, you shall try your new plan; and, if that fails, there is the galvanism."

Range glanced at Pannell, and saw the big fellow's broad forehead pucker up as he began alternately smoothing and spreading out his great beard over his chest.

Just then their eyes met, and Range seemed to read help in them.

Ten minutes after he was strapped down again, his tormentors sometimes keeping him secured in this way for nights together, and then for a night or two he would be left free.

As soon as he was alone he began to think over what had been said, and knew that if at the end of the week he did not give way some more severe test was to be applied.

"What did he say—heroic remedies—galvanism? Oh! they would not dare. I don't know though, men who would proceed to such extremities as these have gone to would do anything."

After a pause he began to think of the look Pannell had given him.

"If I could get a good talk to Jack Pannell I believe he would help me. I don't know though. He is friendly, but as faithful as a man can be to his companions."

He sighed, and felt how hopeless this was as a staff upon which to lean. Then he thought over his attempts that he had made to find a way out, and all in vain.

"I'll try that," he said at last. "What an idiot not to think of it before."

He lay listening now impatiently for the footsteps he knew would soon be heard; and at last Sheldrake came up alone to open the door for Jane, who fetched the breakfast-tray, took it down, and returned directly for a good-clean up, bringing with her the necessary utensils.

"Where is Sheldrake?" said Range as soon as they were alone.

"Do you mean Mr. Frank, sir?" said Jane, looking at him doubtfully.

"Yes, yes, if you like to call him so."

"Sitting just inside the library door, reading his noospaper and watching the stairs."

"Then we can have a chat, Jane."

"Yes, sir, we can have a chat," said Jane, working busily away as she spoke.

"Why don't you write a note for me as I ask you, Jane?"

"Now, Mr. Rarthur, sir, you mustn't arst me; it's more than my place is worth. Why Mr. Frank watches me like a cat, and if I wanted to go to the post or asked any one else to post anything for me he'd know it directly. This is twenty times you've asked me to do this, and, once for all, I won't."

"But, Jane, I'll give you so much money that you shall never want a place again."

"Don't talk stuff, Mr. Rarthur, you ain't got no money to give."

"But I have, I tell you!"

"Now you're getting bad again, just as Mr. Frank said, and your head's all running on money and the lady you was in love with."

"Don't talk like that, girl—I tell you I have money."

"Now you're getting cross," said Jane, rattling her broom in the corner, "but I ain't afraid of you now, because you're strapped down so tight."

"Look here, Jane," said Range, after a pause, "you're a good, faithful girl, and I like you."

"Go along, and don't talk such stuff! The idea!"

Jane gave the skirting-board a tremendous bang with the head of the broom.

"I want you to give me a lead pencil and a bit of paper."

"No, no: I can't! Mr. Frank Range made me promise I never would, and I promised him I wouldn't, and I won't."

"A pen and ink then."

"No, nor a pen an' ink neither. He said I wasn't, nor yet even a bit o' chalk or charcoal, there!"

Here Jane paused to readjust the bib of her apron, which had come undone, and which she secured with a pin.

"You'll give me a pin, won't you, Jane?" said Range, as an idea crossed his mind.

Jane stared at him for a few moments.

"He said knives, and forks, and pocket-knives, and skewers, and string and cotton, and clothes-line, and tape, and lots more things I wasn't to give you, and I dursen't, but he never said a word about pins."

"Then you'll give me a pin, Jane?"

"Well, I don't know," said the girl thoughtfully. "I'd like to give you anything you arst for, but he said you was so very artful you'd be doing yourself a mischief, and you are very artful, you know."

"Am I, Jane?"

"Oh yes, ain't you just! If you wasn't you wouldn't get tapping the wall and talking to me, and pretendin' you was so rich, when you ain't got a brass farden to call your own."

"Ah well! I suppose I am artful, Jane; but it's very hard to be kept shut up here."

"Yes," said the girl, giving her large, soft nose a wipe all along her rough, bare, red arm. "I lay abed and cried about you for hours the night I was bad with the toothache."

"You did?"

"'Course I did. It seems so shocking for such a nice young gentleman as you are to go like you have."

"Then if you feel for me so much you might help me."

"Help you? Oh, I dursen't! Why, there's Mrs. John looks me through and through with those eyes of hers. I say, she'd find me out if Mr. Frank didn't; she is a one!"

"Nonsense! they wouldn't find you out. There, Jane, listen to me. If you'll write and post a letter to the gentleman I tell you I'll make you a rich woman for life."

"There you go! off your head again with your stuff about money! Oh, I oughtn't to talk to you a bit! It only makes you wuss, and Mr. Frank and Doctor Parkins said I wasn't to, only you get coaxing me. There, I won't say another word."

Jane began sweeping furiously, and singing away about the young man who sought to persuade a maiden to forsake the jacket blue. Range tried her over and over again, but it was of no use: she turned a deaf ear to all his words, and sought apparently to make as much dust as she could, in the midst of which Sheldrake came in suddenly without his approach being heard.

All seemed so satisfactory that he beat a retreat again, and Range lay biting his lip, feeling that once more the girl would finish her task as she often had before, and, faithful to her trust and imbued with an unalterable belief in his madness, she would go without his having gained the slightest aid towards his projects.

It was the more galling, for the girl had seemed so simple and the task had appeared at the first blush so easy of attainment, whereas every time he attacked her she seemed to have grown more fierce.

In another five minutes she would be gone, for she was at last dusting the place, when he said in injured tones—

"Well, Jane, I didn't think you would have refused me such a simple thing as a pin."

"Oh, I say, don't!" cried the girl with quite a sob; "don't talk like that, there's a dear! You'd be opening your veins with it and bleeding of yourself to death, same as you did before, Mr. Frank told me, and I should feel as if you'd haunt me as long as I lived."

"Now what nonsense, Jane!" cried Range, as he lay and watched, as mesh after mesh of the net Sheldrake had spun for him was laid bare. "There, it's of no use for me to tell you I never did such a thing in my life."

"Not a bit," said Jane, stoutly. "It ain't that you're such an awful

storyteller, but because you do these things and don't know afterwards. Doctor Parkins said so."

"But I couldn't open a vein with a pin."

"Couldn't you really though?"

"Why of course not."

"But you really won't try?"

"On my word I will not, Jane, there!"

"Well," said the girl slowly and hesitatingly, "he never said a word about a pin, and I will give you that. There," she continued, after a good deal of search, "I won't give you a big one. There's the littlest I've got. I'll stick it in the paper here over the chimney-piece. There!"

"Thank you. You're a good girl, Jane, and I'll never forget it."

"Ah! I'd do lots more for you than that if I durst," said Jane, going to the window to shake her duster and set the dogs baying. "Ugh! you beasts!" she ejaculated. "It's my belief if they got anybody down they'd eat him, that they would! I do hate them dogs. Do you know why they keeps 'em?" she said in a low tone full of mystery.

"To keep me from getting away, I suppose."

"Yes, that's it—the 'orrid things! Ah! they would bite! None of the tradespeople won't come up to the house now, and I always has to go down to the gate to take things in, even the letters!"

"Then you won't give the postman a letter for me, Jane?"

"No," said the girl, shaking her head and dusting vigorously, the motion of her head loosening her beautiful hair, which she began to secure once more.

"I say, Jane," said Range quickly, "give me a lock of your hair."

"G'long!" said the girl, laughing in a silly fashion and giving her shoulders a twitch as she turned away.

"Yes, do, a beautiful long tress, as long as you could cut it."

"Shan't! Now you're making game of me."

"I'm not. I should like a long piece of that lovely black hair."

"Taint lovely! Don't talk such nonsense! Oh, Mr. Range, I'm ashamed of you, that I am!"

"You'll give me a bit?"

"I won't. Oh, the idea!" cried Jane tittering, and turning away her face, ending by catching up broom and brushes and hurrying out of the room.

A few minutes later Sheldrake and Pannell came up, and Range was set free to wander about the room, watch the growth of tree and flower, and the ripening of the fruit from the window, and envy the busy brickmakers toiling amongst the clay.

He was in good spirits though, for he had made a step towards freedom—only one step, and a very small one—so small that it was a pin-point. But with that pin-point he could prick letters on a scrap of paper, or scratch them on a piece of wood, and perhaps get them into some trusty hand.

He had no paper, no wood, and no means of getting them into trusty hands; but he had the pin, and that was a beginning.

CHAPTER L.

A DANGEROUS WITNESS.

"My dear boy, it was an accident," said Sir Harry, "a sad accident, but now that we are beginning to have a little hope I don't see the necessity for you to give up your shooting."

"I feel as if I could never take a gun in hand again," said Carleigh. "Poor fellow! I'm afraid he will never forgive me."

"Nonsense, George! you take it too much to heart. There, get your gun and have a look round. Pick up a few brace—you easily can without the dogs."

Carleigh hesitated, and at last Sir Harry suggested that his brother should accompany him.

"I'll ask him," he said, and he walked into the library, where Judith was reading to Sir Robert.

"What? Go out with George Carleigh? Shooting? No. I'll be——. Don't do that, Judy!" cried Sir Robert, pettishly. "Haven't I told you that I won't have your hand clapped on my mouth when I'm speaking?"

"I never do so, Uncle Rob, only when you talk like that."

"Talk like that! Surely a soldier can give a shot or two when he likes? You should stopper your Uncle Harry when he's hot," chuckled Sir Robert.

"Uncle Harry never makes use of bad language," said Judy, stoutly.

"Oh, doesn't he! That's his artfulness; never does before you. I know."

"Then I'm sure you ought to follow his example, uncle," said Judy, sharply.

"You'll go with the boy, won't you, Bob?" said Sir Harry, laughing.

"No, I won't. Do you want to get me shot? Go on reading, Judy, and then we'll have a walk. I shan't shoot any more this season."

"You must go alone, George," said Sir Harry, returning to the billiard-room; and, after a little more persuading, Carleigh started slowly and with apparent reluctance, but with a strange eagerness in his heart.

He went off across the fields; but as soon as he was out of sight of the house he made a circuit and got round to the outside of the wood, where, by following a track, he could get down into the Wilderness.

He walked quickly, and as soon as he was in the wood he unlocked the breech of his gun and thrust in a couple of cartridges.

This done, he walked on cautiously, as if he were stalking some shy bird that came down to the little streams to drink: and as he walked his eyes wandered here and there, but there was not a soul in sight; and when he had reached the spot he had been making for,

all was so still in the hot September sun that it seemed as if he had had his journey for nothing.

Carleigh's brow was knit and his eyes full of eagerness as he took the last few steps, and then, going down on hands and knees, he began to crawl up a bank diagonally where the stream made a sudden turn, so that, when he reached the top and peered from amongst the high, ruddy bracken, he would be able to command the mass of rock and earth that had blocked the stream on the night he had loosened the roots and widened the crevice.

"At last!" he muttered, as he softly raised his head and peered down, while he gently lifted his gun, but lowered it again, and took a long look round.

There was no one in sight, and poor Bess was too deeply intent tearing away at the hole she was making beneath the rock, having been unchained only about half-an-hour before, when, after going to her master to have her head patted, she had been sent out of the room, and had come straight down into the Wilderness to renew her search.

Her head was right in under the rock now, and the sun shining full upon her glossy back as the gun was once more raised, the ends of the glistening barrels trembling for a moment where they were thrust out amongst the bracken. For a moment or two they were motionless, and then there were a couple of brilliant flashes, two puffs of white smoke rising in the air, and the reports ran echoing along the gully, one so closely following the other that they seemed almost simultaneous.

Then all was still, and the dank, salt odour of gunpowder floated slowly through the gully and died away.

For quite half-an-hour there was not so much as the rustle of a leaf in the Wilderness, and then George Carleigh's face rose slowly above the bracken, and he looked down at where the hole had been scratched beneath the mass of rock.

There was nothing there but some freshly-scraped earth, and for the moment Carleigh thought that he must have missed; but the next moment he saw a black patch a couple of yards away, and, slowly descending, he stood beside poor Bess, lying stretched out as if she were asleep.

But, as he walked round and stood in front of the dog, he found her eyes fixed upon him with what at first seemed to be a fierce look of hatred and defiance, but directly after changed into one of pathetic reproach.

He half expected the poor beast to burst forth into a piteous whine; but Bess was silent, and the soft brown eyes that had so often looked lovingly into those of her master were turning dull.

Carleigh shivered as he glanced round to see if he was observed; but he was quite alone with his victim, and he gave his foot a nervous stamp.

"What an idiot I am!" he exclaimed; "any one would think I had been committing a murder instead of shooting a snarling cur."

As he said these words, he gave another glance round before following out his intention of dragging the dog away amongst the undergrowth.

But his own words startled him, and he could not help glancing at the mass of stone and earth at whose feet the hapless dog had been scratching.

"Are you some little demon?" he exclaimed, excitedly.

He picked up a stone and hurled it at the robin, which had flitted to the hole that the dog had scratched, and was peering in.

The stone fell near, but it hardly scared the bird, which flew now to a neighbouring twig, and watched him as he stooped and seized the dog by one of its hind legs.

Carleigh felt his blood curdle as he saw that little bright eye fixed upon him. It seemed to read him through and through, and, loosening his hold of the dog, he cocked his gun and took aim at the bird.

As he glanced along the barrel and fixed the sight upon the robin, which was some few yards away, the round, clear eye looked full into his in the most unshrinking manner, and, though his finger was upon the trigger, Carleigh did not draw it, but lowered his gun with a shiver of dread, feeling at heart that this bird was a supernatural witness of his deeds, though he excitedly exclaimed—

"Idiot! And about a bird!"

Seizing the dog by the leg once more, he dragged it along amongst the ferns and bushes, up the side of the gully, and away amongst the trees for a hundred yards, to let it roll down into a rift all overhung with briars and bracken.

"There," he said; "if you are found, poachers will get the credit."

He walked hastily back to the gully and gazed at the hole the dog had scraped out from below the stone, kicking in a few rough fragments before he ceased, saying to himself—

"If it is seen they will only think it is a rabbit," and he walked now hurriedly into the fields to have something to show for the shots he had fired; and at the end of a couple of hours' tramp he returned to the Priory with a couple of brace of birds.

CHAPTER LI.

SAM BURTON'S THREAT.

"ALICE, dear," said Judith, one day, "you have some great sorrow on your mind. Why do you not confide in me?"

"Judy," said Lady Fanshaw, smiling sadly, "you have some great sorrow on your mind. Why do you not confide in me?"

"Confidence for confidence," said Judith. "I am ready to begin. Shall I frankly confess?"

"If you would, dear," said Lady Fanshaw, tenderly. "I should feel that you loved me still."

"You should feel it without that, Alice, dear. There, I'll say

everything if it is only for the sake of making you speak and become happier."

Lady Fanshaw looked at her piteously.

"I'm in love!" said Judith, calmly.

"Not with George Carleigh?" cried Lady Fanshaw.

"No," said Judith, quietly. "You do not want me to love him then?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"I am confessing to you, Alice, frankly, as one woman should to another. Be frank with me in turn. Would it hurt you for me to love George Carleigh?"

"Judith, dear, I could not bear it."

"Ah, Alice!" said Judith, reproachfully.

"Don't mistake me," cried Lady Fanshaw. "It would hurt me for you to love George Carleigh, because he is not worthy of your love."

"Worthy or unworthy, he will never call me wife," said Judith, firmly. "Well, I have nothing more to confess, only that I love."

"Yes?"

"Well, there—you know whom. Perhaps I shall never see him again. It is all a folly. He never could have cared much for me; so now I've had my little bit of romance, and I'm growing older and steady enough to be dear Uncle Robert's companion."

Lady Fanshaw clasped her hands convulsively as she gazed with agitated face in the poor girl's eyes, and then closed her own with a piteous sigh.

"There," said Judith, smiling, and kissing her cousin; "I have given you my little confidence, and told you how my poor heart was stolen away and taken over the sea. Now, confidence for confidence!"

"No, no! Don't ask me. I cannot, I dare not, speak."

"Dare not, Alice, dear?" said Judith, looking at her wonderingly.

"Dare not!" cried Lady Fanshaw, excitedly, as she met her cousin's gaze. "No, no, no! Judith, dear, do not look at me like that! I know what you are thinking; I am not the guilty creature you suppose."

"I suppose no such thing," cried Judith, flushing, as she flung her arms round her cousin and kissed her. "I know you were very foolish, but—— Oh, Alice, how could you speak to me like that?"

Alice shuddered.

"George Carleigh, I know, does not behave as he ought. Why don't you speak sharply to him? There, I will."

"You? You speak to him?" cried Alice, in horrified tones.

"Why not? It is to defend you. Besides, Uncle Harry still looks upon him as my future husband, and therefore I have a right to take him to task."

"No, no! You must not speak. Leave it to me. Some day, perhaps, he will go."

"Why not send him away?"

"Sir Harry wishes him to stay for your sake, Judith; but you will not marry him."

"Why not?" said Judith, tentatively, to make her cousin speak.

"Because I know him to be vile and cruel. No fit husband for such a one as you."

"Then why let him stay to pay you attentions at which your soul must revolt? Why not tell dear Uncle Harry?"

"No, no! I could not. Judith, dear, he loves him. He thinks so much of him, and—— Oh! I cannot speak: Judith, you torture me, and I am so weary and helpless to-day."

"You puzzle me, Alice, dear," said Judith, quietly. "If I did not know you to be the best of women, and that you loved dear Uncle Harry with all your heart, I should think—I don't know what I should think."

Lady Fanshaw stared at her wildly.

"Oh! Alice, dear, forgive me!" cried Judith, kissing her passionately. "There! Some day you shall tell me more about your own trouble. Once again let me confide in you and say I shall never marry George."

Lady Fanshaw sighed.

"If Arther Range had asked me again——"

Lady Fanshaw gazed at her with a piteous look in her eyes, and shuddered as she closed them, but only to uncloseth them again with a start of horror, for the conversation brought up the scene in the wood.

"I should—I know—have said 'Yes.' I think it was cowardly of him to go away so suddenly, don't you?"

Lady Fanshaw shivered; but Judith was too much wrapped up in her own thoughts and did not notice it.

"Of course, that was what made him go. Still, it was very off-hand and sudden, and perhaps—perhaps it was for the best. Why! Alice, dear, how ill you look! Let me speak to Uncle Harry about your health; I'm sure you ought to have advice."

Lady Fanshaw shook her head.

"No; I shall be better soon," she said, sadly. "There! it is past: I am going to be cheerful and bright again, and—and you'll always love me, Judith, whatever happens?"

"Alice!" cried Judith, catching her by the shoulders and gazing into her eyes; "you have only half-confided in me: as your cousin, almost your sister, is this right? Am I to think—— Oh, no! I cannot, I dare not! I will not think; but you torture me with this half-confidence."

"Judith, darling, some day perhaps you may know," said Lady Fanshaw, wearily.

"Then there is some secret?"

"A secret that is wearing out my life, till I feel sometimes that it would be bliss to lay it down, and enter into forgetfulness and rest."

"But Uncle Harry?"

"I dare not—could not tell my dear husband!"

"Why?"

"Don't ask me. It is another's secret, dear. It is not mine. Be patient with me. Some day, perhaps, I may tell you all."

Just then they heard voices, and Judith went to the window.

"Oh! look, Alice!" she cried; "here is poor Sam Burton talking to uncle."

Judith ran to the door and hurried out to the front of the house, where—thin, shrunken, and with the honest red and brown of his countenance turned to a sickly white, while his clothes hung loosely upon him—Sam Burton was leaning upon a stick, talking to his master.

The keeper's face brightened and the light came into his dull eye as Judith shook hands with him.

"Thankye kindly, miss, I'm better; and I begin to feel this morning as if I might happen to get well again, thanks to you, miss, and her ladyship. I believe I should have gone, miss, but for your hopeful sort o' words."

"You must thank Lady Fanshaw more than me, Burton," said Judith, warmly. "I'm sure she has done far more than I."

"You were both like a pair of angels at the poor fellow's bedside, my dear," said Sir Harry, proudly.

"That they were, Sir Harry," said the keeper, with the weak tears in his eyes. "They did more for me than the doctor."

"And he had his hands full, Sam. Why! my man, you were a lucky fellow! I was down with just such a wound in the Punjaub, only mine was a bullet and not a shot hole. I got no nursing at all."

"I can never be thankful enough, Sir Harry," said the keeper, "for all that's been done for me."

"Yes, you can, my lad; get well and strong and to your work again! And look here, Burton, I should like you to try and get over this dislike you seem to show to the captain."

"Dislike, Sir Harry?" said the keeper, with a curious change coming over his face.

"Yes; you have always disliked to see him when he wished to come."

"I couldn't help it, Sir Harry. You see he shot me!"

"Yes; it was a terrible accident."

"Ah, yes, Sir Harry; an acciden', o' course, that it gives me a shiver-like to think of, and I couldn't help not wanting to see him when I was so bad."

"Well, well, of course not. I suppose it was natural; but you must master that now."

"I'm goin' to try, Sir Harry," said the keeper.

"That's right: now go and have a gentle walk in the sun, and you are not to worry about any of your business until you are quite strong."

"I may try if I can find out about poor Bess, Sir Harry?" said the keeper, feebly touching his cap.

"What can you do?" said Sir Harry. "The case is plain enough. The dog got in the habit of straying about while you were ill, and she was decoyed away by poachers or gipsies and sold. There'

don't worry, my man. Think of nothing but getting strong. I like to see my wounded men get well: I always did."

He smiled, and tapped the poor fellow gently on the uninjured shoulder; and Sam Burton went slowly on with his back bent, out and away to where he could find a sunny place among the sweet-scented pines; and there, with many a sigh and groan, he lowered himself down into a sitting posture, with his back against a tree, sighing then with content as he half-closed his eyes and gazed down the vistas of tall bronze-red columns that spread around.

"Ah!" he sighed, "I began to think I should never see you again, and that I was going straight away to the other land."

"How queer it all was lying theer off my yead, always going down theer in the Wilderness, getting that spade, and digging and digging and digging for ever, to get out poor Maister Range, only he was buried so deep I couldn't get him up."

"Theer at work ivry night, going down theer and feighting to get out the spade, and trying to dig up that fine young fellow, and nearly getting him out all uncovered, and the face, which I lef' to the last; and then for it always to finish the same—leaving him hidden, and feeling it like a blow from a club as beat me down on my face."

"I wonder how many times I rambled off into that dream that seemed so real—dreaming I was trying to dig him out and being shot down."

"For he did it o' purpose—that he did!" cried the keeper, growing at last so excited that the veins on his white forehead stood out, and he clenched his hands. "It's a man's life agin their trouble; and I mun live for Milly's sake. I could sweer the cowardly hound tried to kill me afore a magistrate—and, by Jove! I will!"

CHAPTER LII.

BALM FOR WOUNDS.

SAM BURTON shook his head and calmed down as he realised once more the consequences of betraying his thoughts.

"No, I can't sweer that," he said. "He did it o' purpose, because he thought I knew too much; but I can't tell. Curse him for a bad 'un as he is!"

"I know it—I knew it every time I had that sort o' dream. It wouldn't have come like that if he hedn't done it, and I know it's reight. Theer, I can shut my eyes now and it all comes back to me, slaving away with the spade, when I got it out, and nearly getting to the poor lad, and the shot coming."

"Yes!" he said, sitting with his eyes closed; "there it all is, and me waking agen out o' the black darkness to find my lady sitting by my bed watching."

"Eh! how I used to think she watched for fear I should be talking wild and other folks hear what I said; but I don't think it weer

now. Poor lass!—she's nobbut a lass, after all—how she used, when she thowt I didn't know, to go down on her knees, and pray; and pray that I might get better; and I shall never forgit that—it sattled it i' my mind—when I was so bad I couldn't speak I heerd her pray that he might be spared that crime too!

"She said it—I heerd her say it—that crime too! Poor lass! poor lass! I felt to hate her once, and to think that I must tell that she needn't be afeard for me. He was always wi' her, tempting her in the garden, like the Devil tempted Eve; and I always think, and shall think, that she resisted him, or she couldn't be such a sorrowful angel as she be.

"Nay, she arn't bad, and he be; and he killed that poor lad, and he tried to kill me, for fear I should let out on him. Ay, and I would, too, in a minute, but it wouldn't be punishing only him, for it would all come out then. Milly says—God bless her! how it seemed to bring us together!—she says Miss Judith's fretting about her sweetheart, but her pride keeps her up, for she thinks he oughtn't to have gone away as he did. Eh! but if she knew what I know! It would kill her.

"Then Sir Harry! I ought to tell on the cowardly hound! But if I did—eh! it would all coom out, and it would break Sir Harry's heart—him as worships his pretty young wife. She's reight; but things would never come strite again, and it would aboot kill the best maister as ever lived, and drive her ladyship mad.

"Eh! bud I know. I can see it all in her eyes. She's living in fear of it's all coming out, and it's half killing her as it is, poor lass. Milly says she sits and sobs sometimes as if her heart would break, and him all the time going about with his handsome face, like the Devil in the garden.

"Wonder whether he'll try to get shut of me again. He wean't dare; but if he do he'll find he's wrong. Not a word 'll I say if he lets me be. But suppose he kills me——"

Sam wiped his brow.

"It's horrid to think on!" he muttered; "a man don't want to die. It scares him!"

He sat thinking for awhile.

"Ah, well!" he muttered; "if he do shoot me again I've made my will. Twenty or thutty poun' arn't much to leave any one, but theer it is, and my bit o' furnitur in the keepin'-room and chamber, and them as opens that bit o' paper 'ill find I say—let the police ask Cap'n Carleigh wheer he weer the time I weer shot. I could say no more.

"Marry Miss Judith!" he said, all at once, excitedly. "My word! I think it would be joost and reight if I had a accident some day when we're oot wi' the goons, and put a charge in him this time for a change.

"Nay, Sam, my lad, thou'lt hev to be quiet. Thou mun put up wi' thy wound for the sake o' them as has been like sisters and fathers to thee more than maisters and mistresses; but I'll hev a sharp eye about, or worse may happen next time.

"Wonder how long it'll be 'fore I'm strong again. It's a bit cowl, but the sun's waarm. Being so weak maks me feel the chill. Two months i' bed, allus dreaming about the Wilderness and the spade. Eh! bud I'm better now, and they needn't be scared—him or my lady, bless her! Sam Burton can be close enew when he likes."

As if from habit, as he sat there, his right hand softly stirring the pine-needles in front of him with his stick, his left hand went down to his side, and made as if to pat and stroke the head of a dog.

The act brought him back from the weak, half-dozing state into which he had sunk with a start, and he struck at the ground fiercely with his stick as, with face convulsed and eyes flashing, he exclaimed—

"If I thought he had killed poor Bess—nay, I do think it!" he cried—"if I could bring it home to him that he killed my poor dog, I don't think I could howd my tongue."

He calmed down, for his quick ear had caught a footstep, and he knew whose it was.

"Nay, I wean't tell," he muttered, "for the sake o' my lady and poor Miss Judith, and my little lass here, who's come to fetch me in. Well, Milly, bairn," he said, half sadly, as the girl came up, "it bean't time yet. I mun stop a bit longer."

"No; you are to come in at once; it gets cold now so soon."

"Eh! well, I'm on'y a poor broken owd wrack; thou mun do as ta wilt wi' me."

"Don't talk so broad, Sam, and don't speak like that, unless you want to make me cry."

"Nay, I wouldn't mak' thy bright eyes dool if I could help it."

"But you can help it," cried Milly, kneeling down on the pine-needles by his side, "and it hurts me—for you to talk so."

"Bud I am a poor wrack."

"You're not," she cried; "you're getting stronger and better every day, and you'll soon be yourself again."

"Mysen again?"

"I said 'self'!" cried Milly.

"Ah, well! self or sen, it be all the same; and when I'm no longer a poor helpless thing that thou canst pet and order about, thou'lt turn skittish, and kick up and run away from me again."

"Shall I, Sam?"

"Ay, I fear so. Say, Milly, has the captain interfered wi' thee again?"

"There!" cried the girl, merrily, as she played with and fondled one of the keeper's thin weak hands. "I said you were nearly well, and you are."

"Why, lass?"

"Because you're getting jealous again, and beginning to scold me. But I don't mind."

"But has he, my lass?"

"What, spoken to me?"

"Yes."

"No, not once. I don't know what's come to him. You used to

say cruel things about her ladyship and him. I believe she quite hates him now, and he tries to court Miss Judith, and she won't stay in the room with him alone. Oh, how black he does look sometimes!"

"And he don't court her ladyship?"

"No, of course not. I say, Sam, how much would a nice little carpet cost, and a hearth-rug?"

"Carpet? hearth-rug?"

"Yes," she said, looking down and speaking very thoughtfully. "I like to see the nice red bricks on the floor in the daytime; but at nights, when one sits down by the fire, a bit of carpet in the middle of the room and a hearth-rug down by the fender does seem so snug."

Burton looked at her wonderingly.

"I thought I should like to buy them—deep red and black, you know," said Milly.

The keeper began to tremble.

"Milly, my lass," he said, hoarsely, "don't play wi' me; I'm very weak yet and ill."

"No, Sam, dear," she said. "I wouldn't be so cruel."

"But you couldn't—think—such a weak—poor owd——"

"Nonsense, Sam!" said the bright little thing. "Why, you'll be strong and well again in a month, and if you did care—to have such a poor, silly young little thing as I am—I'd try—so hard, Sam, to be a good wife, for I do love you, Sam, and I always have very much."

As she spoke she laid her head upon his breast, out there in the quiet pinewood, and his two thin weak arms held her tightly as his breath came ready to choke him, and he tried to speak, but no words would come.

And there they sat for nigh upon an hour, when Milly came to herself.

"Oh, I say!" she cried, "what a nurse I am, keeping you out here in the cold, and it's getting damp. I ought to be ashamed of myself."

"Nay, my little bird," he said, rising with more alacrity than he had shown sitting down, "thou'st done me good. I feel now as if I really was going to get well."

To show his progress he rested one hand on Milly's shoulder and the other on his stick, and walked steadily back towards the Priory, where he was still a guest.

There was no one to see, but if a spectator had been behind he would without doubt have noticed that the stick was not of much use, and that Sam Burton found the soft little prop on the other side a most remarkable support.

Certainly it was much pleasanter to the touch than a hard oaken hook.

CHAPTER LIII.

MEDICINE FOR A MIND DISEASED.

THE days seemed of interminable length, but they glided slowly by.

Range had no tobacco, and his longing for it was intense as he sat at his window and smelt the fumes from Jack Pannell's pipe, when that worthy hung about the garden with the bull-dogs, now digging, now cutting the grass, whose scent was pleasant in the mellow autumn air. He always had some tool or other in his hand, mostly a knife, and he would dawdle about for hours with this and a bit or two of matting through the button-hole of his jacket, ready for tying up loose strands, or to cut away redundant growth.

These days were wonderfully similar, Range's gaolers coming and going; and at last the eve of the seventh day had arrived, and on the next he, as he understood it, was to give way or be submitted to what Mewburn called heroic treatment.

"Let them treat," he had said many times over; "I'm not beaten yet!"

He had had a chat or two with Jane, but very short ones, through the wall, for they had been interrupted. The pin was hidden in a corner, ready for use when he had a chance; but no chance came, and he walked up and down the room thinking, and ended by going to the window to watch the brickmaking, forcing himself to take great interest in the progress of the kilns, some of which were still burning, while the bricks in others, finished and cooled down, were being carted off to the barges in the canal, their destination the walls of houses in the great city.

The brickmaking seemed to be over for the season, and the busy toil no longer went on as when first he watched it; barrows were not run here and there, and the muddy children had departed.

"When the winter comes," he said to himself, "that will be a dismal waste, and I shall have some fresh interest to seek unless I am free."

He was sitting by the open window chirping in imitation of the sparrows' cry, and so like that the little things hopped about in the ivy-covered gutter over his head, answering him, and ready to come down to the sill as soon as he drew back.

All at once he saw Pannell cross the garden with a good-sized ladder on his shoulder.

"Where's that kept?" thought Range, as his heart gave a throb. For there was the means of surmounting the high wall, raising the ladder up, passing it over, and descending the other side, with no fear of a sprained ankle or jar to hinder flight when once outside.

Pannell disappeared by coming nearer to the house, and soon after there was a rustling noise, and directly came a loud tapping and the scent of tobacco.

"I'll ask him for some and a book to read," said Range to himself; "that will give me paper for my messages."

He was about to speak when the dull sound of footsteps could be

heard in the next room, and then faintly came a peculiar cough that Sheldrake uttered from time to time.

This stopped him, and he listened to the tapping beneath his window.

"How are you getting on, old man?" came from below.

Range did not reply. He did not know that the question was intended for him.

"I say, how are you getting on, old man?" came again.

"Are you speaking to me?" said Range, with his face pressed between the bars.

"Of course I am! How goes it?"

"Oh! I'm happy as the day's long," replied Range. "Plenty of books to read and cigars to smoke. Every enjoyment I could wish for, except a billiard-table. Can you have one set up for me?"

"Don't chaff!" growled Pannell.

"What are you doing?"

"Nailing up the ivy. Blown loose. I say, I'm sorry for you, old man!" came in a good-humoured growl.

"You're a——well, one who tells untruths!" retorted Range. "If you were sorry, you'd set me free."

"What! and pitch over my friends, eh? No, that wouldn't do! I say, you'd better give in, old man. Pay up and go."

"Ask me in ten years' time."

"Ah, well! just as you like; but you'll have to," said Pannell.

"Hang the ladder! I was nearly over."

Range heard a hasty descent and what sounded like a rearrangement of the ladder. Then, Pannell seemed to mount again and to tap in nail after nail.

"I say, Range, old man," came up.

"Well?"

"Look here, I like you, old fellow—I do, really."

"You are showing it!"

"Can't help it. I'm bound. But, look here, can I do anything for you?"

"Yes; write to Sir Harry Fanshaw about how I'm fixed, and then make yourself safe; and as soon as I'm clear of this cursed gang I'll write you a cheque for a thousand pounds. And I swear, as man to man, I will never prosecute you—mind, *you!*"

"Will you make it five?"

"No," said Range; "and I won't give a dollar to either of your friends."

"Well, I wouldn't if you'd make it five, old man," said Pannell, tapping in another nail. "And just look here, I suppose I'm a blackguard, but no one ever found me go against my friends, so don't you get trying that on again."

"Why did you ask me if you could help me, then, you great scoundrelly bully?"

"Go it!" said Pannell, chuckling. "Look here, I only wanted to do you a good turn if I could. Like a book or two?"

"No."

"A few cigars?"

"No."

"Yes, you would. You didn't say that as if you wouldn't. I'll give you some first chance——Eh?"

"What are you talking to yourself about?" came up now in Mewburn's voice.

"Because I like to converse with a respectable man," replied Pannell.

"Here, come down, and don't stop fooling there! We shall be too late for the train."

"Shell ready?"

"Yes. He was coming down when I did. You're always nailing up something."

"Shouldn't mind nailing you up, Nathan, like a hawk on a barn-door; or in your coffin, if you like," growled Pannell. "I'm coming."

"Don't leave that ladder there."

"Who's going to?" was the reply. "Wouldn't matter if I did. Don't reach high enough."

"Here come along—there's no time to lose."

Range heard Pannell's voice in a muttering growl, the rustle of the ladder amongst the ivy, then steps on the gravel, and after that all was still.

"They are going out," he thought—"perhaps gone. Oh! if I could get out that bar!"

He seized it and tugged and strained with all his might, but in vain. The bar was quite fast, and he gave up in despair, and went and examined the locks of the door; but he could do nothing without tools, and he had only a pin.

He walked to the window and looked out to see that the bull-dogs were on the lawn, ready to start up and growl, but subside as he drew back; and he was wondering whether he could do anything, when there was a cough in the next room, and he flew to the wall and tapped, the signal being answered at once.

"You there, Jane?" he said.

"Yes. They've all gone out but Mrs. John, and won't be back till night."

"Where have they gone?" he said, excitedly.

"I don't know, Mr. Arthur; but I heard Doctor Parkins say something about 'Apothecaries' Hall."

"Apothecaries' Hall!" said Range to himself. "That's in London. What an opportunity! Jane!" he cried aloud.

"Yes, Mr. Arthur."

"Listen to me!"

"Yes, Mr. Arthur, I am a-listening."

"Get me the keys of these doors and let me out."

"Oh! Mr. Arthur; I shouldn't dare if I could, and——"

The girl coughed loudly—a signal they had agreed upon; and Range stood with his ear to the wall, listening, and not in vain, for

directly after he heard the murmur of another voice, in low deep accents, that he knew only too well, and then they died away and a door closed.

"I must depend upon myself," he said, with his breath hissing between his teeth. "No help will come from outside."

He stood thinking a moment or two, and then ran to the door and tried and shook it, placing his shoulder to the portion by the lock; but after a few minutes he gave up in despair.

"Like a rock!" he muttered. Then he ran to the window, and, placing his feet upon the sill, drew himself up, and, seizing one of the middle bars with both hands, drew and strained with all his force; but the bar did not budge. The frame was too strong, and the iron let in too far.

"It is maddening," he panted; "no tools, no means of escape. If I had but a file or a steel saw!"

He stopped and listened, with hope rising in his breast, for there was the sound of a lock shooting back, and then of a bolt drawn.

It was only a faint sound, for it was beyond the double doors of his room, one of which he felt sure was of baize.

"Jane has the keys!" he panted, and he advanced to the door; but only to stop short as he heard the rustle of silk, and then a pause; a jarring noise as of a small bar being swung round, and then to his surprise one of the little panels at the top of the door opened away from him, and he saw the handsome, mocking face of Sarah Pannell gazing in, framed like a picture in the solid wood.

CHAPTER LIV.

AT THE WICKET.

THEY stood gazing at each other for quite a minute—she with her irritating, contemptuous smile; he with a frown deepening on his face as he noted the size of the little panel, of whose existence he had been ignorant, and wondered whether he could get it open when she was gone and force his way through, till he recalled the fact that there were two doors beyond.

"Well," she said, "why don't you speak? Are you not glad to see a visitor?"

He did not answer, only looked at her coldly, and thought what a handsome, cruel face it was.

"Why don't you speak?" she said; "are you afraid of me?"

The disposition in his mind was to fiercely revile her and bid her go; but he was a prisoner, and this woman doubtless had the keys that would set him free. He felt that he must temporise, and he replied—

"Afraid? No. Are you, that you look at me as if I were a wild beast in a cage?"

"Well, you are so fierce and mad," she said, laughing in a forced

way, "I dare not open the door and come in. How ridiculous you look like that!"

She laughed at him mockingly, and, in spite of his self-command, Range felt the warm colour spread over his smooth face and bare head.

"Well," she said, "what are you going to do?"

"Treat you with the contempt you deserve," he said, coolly.

It was the woman's turn to flush now, and an angry glare seemed to burn in her dark eyes; but she mastered her annoyance and changed her tactics at once.

"No, you are not," she said, in her low, soft voice. "I do not deserve it. Listen to me, Arthur. I began by mocking and laughing at you, but it was only to hide the real feelings in my breast. I cannot bear it longer, and I am come to tell you how it pains me to see you like this. I am going to help you."

"Is this some new form of banter?" he said, bitterly. "A fresh way of bringing me to your knees, as you called it?"

"No, no! No, no! you do not understand me. A woman is so weak that she has to fly to her anger for weapons against you strong men. I was angry and bitter when I said all that, Arthur. I did not mean it, and I cannot bear to see you like this."

"Do you mean it?" he said.

"Mean it? You know I do."

"Show it, then, by opening that door and telling me where to find clothes that I can wear without exciting notice."

"Yes, I will," she said, eagerly. "They have all gone to town, and the course is open. I will do all you wish."

"Then I am ready with any apologies you ask," said Range warmly. "I retract everything, and you shall find me the most grateful of friends."

"Apology?" she said softly—"grateful—friends. Is this all you can bestow on the woman who is ready to give up everything for your sake?"

"I do not understand you."

"You do not understand me," she whispered; and she passed her hand through the aperture, with its palm extended, the long taper fingers seeming to ask that they might be taken and nestle warmly in his.

He hesitated for a moment, and then took the hand and held it.

"Well, yes," he said; "I'm ready to forgive and forget. I'll shake hands."

"Forgive, but not forget," she said, softly. "How could they behave so cruelly towards you!"

Range flushed again as he saw her deep dark eyes gazing pityingly, it seemed, in his face.

"Oh! it doesn't matter. It will grow again," he said, laughingly. "They did not dig my hair up by the roots. So you will let me out?"

"Have I not told you I would do anything for your sake?" she whispered. "I have tried so hard to be angry and hate you, but I could not keep to it. The thought that you were in pain and

suffering was ever troubling me, and you see I have come humbly to ask forgiveness and do penance for the past."

"Then the past is dead," he said. "Open the door and set me free."

"And those men?"

"What, Sheldrake and your husband?"

"Hush! Don't name him!" she exclaimed, with her brow growing puckered. "Tell me what you mean to do."

"To do? Well," he said, laughing, "I think the very first thing I should do would be to get myself a wig."

"You are trifling with me," she cried, excitedly. "Tell me what you really propose to do. We should not dare to stay in London—you would take me on the Continent at once."

"Take—you?"

"Yes. This is no time for scruples. Have I not told you that I would give up all for your sake? This life is loathsome to me; that man disgusts me. The society of his companions is odious. I want to be free of this wretched life of deceit and treachery. Take me away to some land where we can forget all the pangs and sufferings of the past. Now: at once, only tell me that you love me, and we will go."

Arthur Range coloured like a girl, turned white, and then his countenance assumed the aspect known as black.

"Take you—away with me?" he said.

"Yes, yes! Don't hesitate. Every minute is of value when we have to deal with such a man as Frank Sheldrake."

"And John Pannell?"

She snatched her hand away, and looked at him fiercely.

"Why do you mention him now?" she cried. "I tell you I hate him."

"But I don't. He seems to me a very decent kind of scoundrel, with a good deal of honour in his disposition; and he is your husband."

"Yes, to my sorrow," she cried, bitterly.

Then, changing her tone—

"Why do you talk like this, Arthur? Abroad there you made me love you. What is the world to us? Let me free you, and far away from here let all this terrible time be like a dream."

"I mean to make it so when I have escaped," he said, coldly.

"Then you will come?"

"What, out of here? Give me the chance."

"And we shall——"

"I won't say anything about *we*," he replied, coldly. "There, let us understand one another at once. It is as well to speak plainly."

"Yes, yes, pray speak!" she cried.

"The fact is, then, that your friends——"

"Don't call them my friends, Arthur," she said. "I hate and despise them, and the life they have forced me to lead."

"Well, then, these confederates have made a mistake."

"Mistake—what in you—in your firmness? Yes; I have admired it ever since you came."

"I don't mean that," he said, coldly. "They have shut me up here with the character of being mad. I am sane enough; the madness lies with you, and places should be changed."

She stood, trembling with rage and disappointment, biting her lip with her white teeth, and her eyes flashed as she read his firmness, and how vainly she had degraded herself, to stand lower than ever in his eyes.

"I am much obliged to you," he continued, "and if you like to set me free I shall thank you after my own way, not after yours. If you do not, I am satisfied to wait my time."

"Do you not know that they will nearly kill you to have their way?"

"I expect they will stop at nothing, but they have not yet won their game."

"Oh, you do not mean this!" she cried, mastering her rage once more to make a last effort. "I offer you freedom, love, and happiness. Come, I can trust your word. Tell me I shall be your companion, and you are free. I tell you I will dare everything, even their rage, for your sake."

He looked at her half pityingly, half in disgust—that a woman should so degrade herself in his sight.

"No," he said, turning away to walk to the window and back. "They say, fight a certain person with his own weapons, madam, and I suppose I am at liberty to stand at nothing when dealing with such men as Sheldrake's gang; but your terms are not such as I could agree to, and——why, the woman's gone!"

In effect, the little wicket-like panel was closed, without a sound, and the doors were shut so silently that it was only by listening intently that he could detect the shooting bolts.

CHAPTER LV.

A LOCK OF A LADY'S HAIR.

"JUDITH didn't care for me a pin," said Range, as he sat at his window staring down at the thick-headed bull-dogs, while, resting their heavy jowls upon their paws, they stared up at him, "but somehow I loved her very dearly.—I suppose it was love and very dearly," he mused.

"Seems very unfortunate for me, but I don't know; it was all right. A feeling like that for a sweet, refined woman who seems pure and holy to a man makes him different. The whole time that handsome she-fiend was proposing to me escape and freedom and what she called love in a foreign land, I seemed to see Judith's pretty little soft fair-haired head looking on and watching me to see what I was going to do.

"Yes, I suppose it is love I felt—feel for her, and, unless I alter

very much, it seems to me that my feeling for that sweet, refined English lady is going to influence my life.

"I don't hold any grudge against her. It was not natural. She was engaged to that captain, poor girl! and it was what she looked forward to as her duty. She was never anything but kind to me. I had no business to be so fiery and to go spoiling a sweet kind of friendship by making love.

"Friendship! Yes, I suppose that's what she thought it, and I'm going to think it so and keep her dear memory locked up here tightly, as long as I live, and I think it will make me a better man.

"Why? Because, God bless her! I shall always feel that I may run against her again some day, and when I do I should like to be able to meet her sweet innocent eyes, and let her look me through and through.

"Wonder whether she'll have any children when she's the captain's wife. Seems to me that I should like to know those little ones. Perhaps I shall: who knows? Perhaps not. Carleigh didn't like me, and he's one of the sort who couldn't believe in a man feeling a sort of reverence like—a something approaching worship—for a woman.

"God bless her!" he said softly. "If she loved me I'd give all I have to get free," and his eyes grew dim in the evening light, for he had been sitting thoughtfully there, pondering on Sarah Pannell's visit and his position.

"Yes, a feeling like that keeps a fellow straight," he went on with more energy in his tones. "Let her—let all of them do their worst. I'm a weak sort of fellow, I suppose, but there's a deal to be done by holding on tight and letting people try to drag you away till they're tired."

His musings were cut short by the sound of the doors opening, and he found that his gaolers had returned and his dinner was brought up.

The next was cleaning day, and Jane arrived as usual, looking daggers at him for something; but upon this occasion, for a long time, she was not left alone with the prisoner, who found that Mewburn and Pannell were disposed to hang about all the time, Sheldrake coming in at intervals.

He had again been strapped down without offering resistance, for it was so much waste of energy with no gain for recompense, so he suffered the indignity, and lay watching Jane and sometimes answering a remark made by Jack Pannell.

The latter had stopped back, and this unusual action had had the effect of raising Mewburn's suspicions, and, as above said, he too hung about the room.

At last, as Mewburn was standing by the window and Jane was busy with her duster, Pannell, who was seated upon the edge of the bed, said aloud—

"Well, it's your business; but if I were you, Arthur Range, I

should strike my colours now. There's good advice, take it or leave it."

As he spoke he quietly raised the quilt and placed upon the bed a cigar-case and a couple of books, carefully drawing back the coverlid before rising and going slowly to the door.

Range darted a look at him full of gratitude, and then dropped the lids over his eyes as Mewburn followed him out and the door closed.

"I just thought as them two never meant to go," said the girl in a hasty whisper, as she began fumbling with one hand in the bosom of her dress, and hitching herself about to get something within reach.

"It is unusual," said Range, smiling up at the girl.

"Oh yes, you may laugh!" she cried. "Nice and innocent you pretend to look. I don't like it, so I tell you. Just you tell me now, what did that Mrs. John want here yes'day?"

"Want here?"

"Yes; she come in, didn't she?"

"No, Jane, she talked to me from outside the door."

"Did you want her to come?"

"No, Jane, and I hope she'll never come again."

"You do?"

"Yes, of course."

"I've a good mind not to give it to you. I said I wouldn't when I come up to clean, but there it is, and——hish! here they are."

She hastily thrust something beneath his pillow and scuffled to the windows, to one of which she gave a rub as the three companions entered the room.

"That will do, Jane," said Sheldrake, blandly. "The place will do very nicely, my good girl. You may go now."

Jane caught up her apparatus and departed. Bands and straps were set free, and Sheldrake said in his bland manner—

"Well, my dear Arthur, your time is up. How do you feel after this long consideration?"

Range turned from him, rose from the bed, and walked to the window.

"A fresh phase of his complaint, doctor," said Sheldrake blandly. "I'm afraid you will have to try your course."

Range listened, but he did not turn his head, but stood listening in dread, lest his tormentors should examine the bed and find his presents.

He was relieved though, for after saying with a harsh chuckle, "Have no fear for the result, my dear sir. I shall bring him to his senses," Mewburn moved to the door, the others followed, and Range was left alone.

He listened eagerly till the last door was closed, and then threw back the quilt, to find a couple of novels and the case full of cigars, the donor's forethought having included a box of wax matches.

"Something to kill time and thought," Range said to himself, "and—yes, fly-leaves for messages. Now for the line."

He turned back the pillow to find, clumsily doubled up in an old envelope, a long strand of hair twisted up into a ring, one which, when shaken out, was nearly four feet long.

"Why there's enough, carefully joined," cried Range, "to fly a kite! I shall beat them yet!" and in his excitement he began at once carefully knotting the delicate threads of long hair together, as if he were making a fishing-line; and as he went on he wound the hair thread upon a little bit of stick taken from the ready-laid fire.

He stopped in the midst of his work to think, perhaps wearied a little, for it was a tiresome task that tying together of the delicate threads.

"A fellow in my position snatches at very slight threads—even at hairs," he said bitterly. "Isn't this all folly? I've got to tie a scrap of paper with an appeal upon it to the end of this thread, and get the wind to blow it over the wall, pulling it back till the right puff comes; so I shall want the wind in the right direction and a man out there beyond the wall at the same time, and the chances are a thousand to one that I shall not get them."

Just then he raised his eyes.

He was seated close to the window so as to get the full light on his fine threads, and there, on the other side of the wall, was a big, rough-looking man, clay-daubed, unkempt, and ragged. His bare arms were folded across his half-bare chest, a short black pipe was in his mouth, and he was staring up curiously at the window.

"If my thread and letter were only ready!" exclaimed Range, starting up and placing his face close to the bars, giving the man a friendly nod, and waving his hand to him.

The man was about thirty yards away, and near enough for Range to see the changes in his countenance, which wore at first a dull, stolid expression as he stared heavily. Then a smile began at the corners of his eyes, and spread till his mouth expanded in a broad grin: and, taking his pipe from his lips with one hand, he bent himself and slapped his knee with the other, laughing hoarsely.

Range shrank back as if he had received a blow, and sank into his chair, red with anger, stung to the heart, and with a miserable feeling of despair coming over him, as he realised again how tightly he was secured by the confederates' plans.

The glass had been left upon the nail, and, avoiding the window, he crept to it, took it down, gazed at the white head and smooth countenance within, and then threw himself upon the bed, with his face buried in his hands.

He could not stay there long, for the knowledge that he had been within speaking distance of a man who might help him made him creep once more to the window.

"I'll call to him and tell him I'm not mad," he said to himself; and then, bitterly, "he will not believe me."

But there was no chance to try, for the man's back was towards him now, and he was a couple of hundred yards distant, heavily plodding over the rough brick-field.

Range watched him till he disappeared in a hut nearly a quarter of

a mile away, and then, in a disconsolate manner, he rolled up the long tress of hair and hid it along with that he had tied together, beneath the mattress, and sat down to think in a more despairing mood than he had been in for days.

"They've got me fast," he thought—"faster than I could have believed. Shall I have to give up at last?"

He rose and began pacing the room, when suddenly he recollected Pannell's present, and taking out the case he lit a cigar and began to smoke, for he was hungry and faint.

"No!" he exclaimed, as he sent a thoroughly enjoyed puff of smoke into the air, "I will never be beaten like that!"

Then he stopped, turning the cigar over and over in his hand, thinking, for, though dulled, the sensation of hunger was on the increase.

It was very strange their keeping him so long without a meal.

Suddenly a thought flashed through his brain of certain words and allusions he had heard.

"The scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "They are surely not going to starve me into submission!"

CHAPTER LVI.

"THEY'LL DRIVE ME MAD!"

NOT exactly starve, but bring him down to a point that should force him to submit.

That night Range went dinnerless to bed, and the next morning the tray was brought in by Mewburn, who smilingly placed it on the table, and Range saw that it bore nothing but a cup of tea and a slice of bread.

"Keep down the feverish symptoms," Mewburn said, with an ugly smile. "We have been following the wrong regimen, and the stomach has grown proud."

Determined upon a course of masterly inaction, as he called it, Range partook of his meal in silence—a very poor and unsatisfying repast, and was left alone to consider his plan about floating a message pricked on a slip of paper over the wall. The plan had this advantage, that should he lose the scrap it would not, if it fell inside, attract the attention of any one, as it bore no writing. If it were of any avail it must be from some one seeing it flying in the air—some one outside.

So he prepared a scrap, carefully pricking upon it the words:—

"A gentleman is kept prisoner here. Take this to the police."

All being ready, Range waited for a fortnight before there was a breeze that would waft his message over the wall.

When it did come one afternoon, he unwound his silky thread, and with throbbing breast tied the scrap of paper to it securely and sent it flying before an audience of bull-dogs, who looked on attentively.

It was a curious kind of fishing—fishing for liberty, Range called it. The paper fluttered off at once, made a dart towards the wall, and was well on its way when it was caught by a lurking wind that might have been in Sheldrake's pay, for it pounced round the end of the house and dashed the scrap of paper into a tree, from which it refused to be parted, spinning round and round a twig till some inches of the hair-line were wound up, and there it stayed like an awkwardly-shaped blossom with only one petal. Then the hair-line parted on being pulled, and Range had to begin again.

He tried some half-a-dozen times during the next two or three weeks before he told himself that it was madness, for if he succeeded in getting one message well over the wall there was no one to see it.

"I might have known," he said, sadly; "but I was glad to cling even to a hair."

During these weary days and weeks his captors turned their siege into a blockade.

"That's what we must call it," said Sheldrake, smiling—"a blockade of the disease, eh, doctor?"

Mewburn smiled and nodded, and a slow process of starvation was carried on—not literal starvation, but just sufficient was given at every meal, and of the simplest kind, to keep the prisoner alive.

"I think this will prove effectual," said Mewburn, one morning, handing the prisoner the glass. "You look so much better, my dear Mr. Range."

Range made no reply.

"We are always ready to try a new departure, my dear Arthur—yours," said Sheldrake, nodding pleasantly. "When you think change of air would do you good, and you are ready to pay the expenses, pray speak, and steps shall be taken at once. Five minutes would transact our business—a few days settle it."

Pannell said nothing, but contrived to come out last, throwing two or three cigars behind him as he closed the door: and Range was left again to himself and the despair he would not show.

Days, weeks, months had passed; the weather had become cold, wet, and winterly, and the laid fire in the grate was a mockery, for at times the prisoner suffered severely from cold as well as hunger.

He knew his room by heart, every crack in the ceiling, every pattern upon the paper, which he had tortured into endless figures as he sat or lay, and thought how long was this to go on.

Sometimes he buoyed himself up with the hope that inquiry would be made after him; but always face to face came the knowledge that he had shut himself out from that help. He had told the Fanshaws that he was going, and his portmanteau lay ready packed and directed, so that the servants would send it to the hotel, where it would be forgotten. There was no one to ask for him, stranger as he was. Judith Nesbitt would expect no letter, and, till he had been absent from home a year, there was not the slightest chance of inquiry being made after him.

There was the only spark of hope: Uncle Wash had said that if he did not return in a year he would come in search of him—a year, and he had lost count of time since he had been a prisoner. All he knew was that many months must have elapsed.

It was a hard fight to keep on this obstinate defence, when a few strokes of the pen would have set him free; but, strangely enough, the thought of Judith Nesbitt helped his resistance.

“If I were at liberty,” he said, in a despondent tone, “I should be hanging about after her—I know I should—and only be insulted by that Carleigh and repulsed by her. Perhaps it’s as well that I’m shut up out of mischief.”

Not one chance of any kind, eagerly as he watched for it, did he find of escape, and there it went on—see-saw—a fortnight’s starvation, then a relaxation, as if his gaolers were afraid of going too far; when he had more nutritious food, but always of the coarsest kind. And on all those weary days—save on that one occasion—not a soul approached the back of the premises but that brickmaker; while now the brickfield was a deserted slough, except where in the distance some brick-carting and barge-loading went on.

Hundreds of plans did Range make to escape, violence seeming at last to be the only course left; and he went on waiting his time, while no opportunity came.

One day the idea came to him to arm himself with a good stout staff; and to do this he worked laboriously and carefully to take one of the chairs to pieces, and fitted it together again, ready to seize upon a leg when he should want it—keeping the loose chair in the corner, where it was not likely to be touched.

Three to one were terrible odds, but he had made up his mind for it, and he was waiting his chance. He had conceived the notion of putting his captors off their guard, and that took time—a patient expenditure of time. They were half starving him, and they should think he had grown so weak that they might become careless.

To carry this out, he assumed a listless air and submitted to the pinioning and unfastening with a supreme indifference, suppressing the tingling vigour in his nerves, and the moment he was freed seating himself upon the edge of the bed or the nearest chair till his gaolers were out of hearing.

Of late, too, he had had to suffer another deprivation: Jane did not come to tidy up his room, everything being done by John Pannell in a deft, sailor-like fashion.

The monotony of the existence was horrible; but, buoyed up by first one hope and then another, Range held out. Now he watched the wall, the brickfield, and listened to the trains. Every sound of wheels faintly heard from the road had its interest, and the trains were to him as a kind of clock by which he measured his day, for, save when the wind was in one direction, he never knew the time.

He seemed so weak now that he was in hopes his captors would grow careless, and that some morning, armed with the stout cudgel formed by the chair-leg, he might seize the opportunity when the

way was opened, strike a few blows right and left, and dash through the door, close it after him, and escape. But time went on and the opportunity did not come, though the cudgel lay at the foot of the bed morning after morning, just covered by the quilt and ready to his hand.

He had no common men to deal with. They were as alert as the sparrows upon his sill. For he had tried scores of times to capture the Captain or Uncle Wash; but they were too watchful, and his efforts only made them wild, though they came to be fed as usual after a day or two's scare.

One of his gaolers was always on the watch, and they were as careful now as they were on the first day. The golden prize was in their hands, and they did not mean to let it slip through. That was evident, and Range had to take into consideration that an attempt which did not result in success would only make his position worse.

"They'll drive me mad!" he said one morning, after pacing the room in a terrible state of excitement. "I can feel that they are doing it; and, once they get my mind astray, curse them! they will be able to do what they please.

"Yes, that's it!" he said, excitedly, and with the veins in his temples swelling; "that's their plan. But it is too horrible to think of—too horrible—too horrible!"

He shuddered and covered his face with his hands, to keep them there for some little time; and when at last he lowered them he looked round with a curiously-furtive look, and ended by crossing to where he could gaze at himself in the glass.

He turned away shivering and paced the room again, till it seemed as if he would—like some caged animal—wear a track in the boards.

"It would be too horrible!" he cried at last, with a burst of fury; "better that I should make them suffer. Yes, why not? It would be in self-defence, and they have driven me to it. This is getting to be more than I can bear."

At that moment the familiar sound of shooting bolts fell upon his ear, and he stood listening for a while. Then, as if satisfied that the time had come, he snatched the stout cudgel from where it was hidden and stepped behind the door, ready for the first enemy who should come, and to relieve the horrible tension of his mind by making a bold dash for liberty.

CHAPTER LVII.

"I WISH SHE WERE DEAD!"

SAM BURTON was wrong or partly wrong. There was humanity in the act, but Alice Fanshaw did sit and watch by his side during his illness, in her horror lest others should hear his wanderings; for he did rave in his delirium of Carleigh and his firing at him and of the murder in the wood.

As the watcher sat by his side in the long hours of the night, she shivered as he raved about the spade and the dead man buried there.

"It is part of my punishment," she groaned. "Oh, how bitterly I am paying for my folly! Will this misery never end?"

She laid her hand upon the sick man's brow, and for a time it calmed him; but soon he began to mutter wildly again, and his nurse trembled as she thought of what she had drawn upon herself.

Carleigh was beginning to hate her—she could see that; and once she shivered as she thought—

"He tried to kill this man to hide his crime: will he try to slay me?"

"Well, let him," she said, wearily. "What have I to live for now? But he must know first: I could not rest if I bore that secret to my grave."

It was a terrible time—that watching by Burton's bed; for all the past came up as it had come to her before, and she shuddered again as she thought of how Carleigh had obtained increased leave of absence on the plea of ill-health.

"It is because he dare not leave," she said. "He will be watching me still."

"At last," said Carleigh, one morning. "After months of waiting you have at length given me this opportunity. No, no, don't speak! Hear me! There! you have nothing to fear. We are within sight of the house; neither my touch will pollute you, nor scandal have anything to say."

"What do you wish to say to me?" said Lady Fanshaw, coldly.

"That I have been patient and forbearing. I left my regiment that I might be near you, and now I am going to ask you for my reward."

He felt half-startled as he saw the strange look she gave him, and, now that they were alone together and the forced smile she always wore was gone, she looked ghastly, and he felt chilled.

"Why have you not left this place?" she said.

"Do you ask me that?"

"You remember my threat?"

"Perfectly. I valued it at its true worth."

"You have kept to the rule I laid down at the time, but now you have broken it."

"Pooh, Alice! don't let's talk in this high-faluting way. Come, why not accept the inevitable? It is fate. Why fight against it?"

"You have ceased to persecute Judith. Till now you have ceased to persecute me. I am glad you have spoken."

"You are!" he exclaimed, but with the old eagerness dulled, and he half wondered at himself—he felt so little pleasure at her words.

"Yes; I am glad you have spoken. I can bear this life no longer."

"My darling!" he whispered; "and you will flee from it; you will take shelter from these storms, and in a life of joy seek for rest and happiness and recompense for the slavery and misery we have endured?"

She did not seem to hear his low, earnest words, but went on speaking in a thoughtful, dreamy way.

"I had hoped that you would have gone first."

"So as to quiet suspicion; and you would have joined me?" he whispered.

"All these weary months!" she continued, as she sat upon a garden-chair, bent forward, gazing straight before her, with one hand resting upon her knee as she passed the other mechanically over it to and fro. "At times it has seemed too hard to bear—too hard to bear."

Carleigh looked wonderingly at her thin face, and the wild look in her eyes, fixed apparently upon where the brothers were seated and Judith was reading.

"It has been hard—maddening," whispered Carleigh. "That was a terrible shock, Alice; but it is our secret—we can keep it. It was not what people would call it. He fell in fair fight."

"When I look at her," continued the wretched woman, "I feel as if I had blighted her young life. When I think of him, I seem to see him pointing at me and calling me murderess. Night after night that scene in the wood repeats itself; and, lastly, comes the horror of your final act. I never see that poor fellow, so thin and wasted, struggling back from death, but his eyes tell me that he knows all."

"Are you mad, Alice?" he said, in an angry whisper. "You do not think I tried to shoot Burton?"

"To hide our guilty secret—yes," she said, calmly.

"Oh! this is folly," he whispered. "Come, be a woman. Let us go back to what we were saying, and not talk of that miserable accident. You said you could bear this life no longer."

"Yes," she said, with a hoarse sigh, "I can bear this life no longer. I cannot let him take me to his breast, kind, generous, and loving; always anxious about my health, and I always deceiving him about the cause. It is horrible. My life is one long lie."

"Then end it," he whispered.

"I have often thought I must," she said. "There is the river, but it would be the death of the impenitent and coward."

"You mad woman," he whispered, angrily. "I said end it with the beginning of another of real love, real passion. Alice, I love you more than ever; say but the word, and we will leave this life of misery for one of joy in some sunny land."

"You mistake me, George Carleigh. I warned you before with threats. Months of misery and despair have changed me terribly. I now warn you with prayers, for I would not have you suffer as I have done."

"Threats, prayers—they are the same to me. Come with me, Alice—to-night—my darling! You will hear me at last."

"I say again," she continued, in the same low, monotonous voice, "you mistake me. I can bear this life no longer. I give you time to escape the punishment of your crime—to escape from him, my husband, lest he, in his just anger, should lay the man he believed in dead at his feet."

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"I have prayed for strength and guidance month after month,"

she said, still passing her hands one over the other upon her knee, and staring before her with the same fixed look, "and the same thought always comes to me. It is my duty—the only reparation I can make. I must tell him all."

"Alice, you are mad!"

"Yes," she said, hoarsely; "I am mad. Can you be surprised? Is it not enough? For myself I wonder that I can sit here, or day by day at the table, and talk and smile as if there were no crushing load upon my brain. Yes, at times I am mad; and the only relief I can find is in the hope that rest may come when I have told him all."

"I say you are raving mad!" he panted.

"Yes," she repeated; "mad; and rest will come when I have told him all. He will forgive me, or he will kill me! I shall have expiated my fault by confessing it to him, and it will bring rest."

She said these last words very slowly, and with the strange far-off look in her eyes intensified.

Carleigh thrust back his chair, and sat gazing at her for a few moments in silence.

"You will tell your husband all?" he said.

"Yes—everything! I must."

She still kept passing her right hand over her wedding-ring and back, but all fixed and unchanging, as she stared straight away.

Carleigh essayed to speak, but for a few moments no words came. Then, passing his tongue hastily over his dry lips, he said, harshly—

"You say you are mad?"

"Yes—mad!"

"Then who will believe you?"

"He will—my husband."

"In preference to me, the man he has loved as a son from boyhood?"

"And you dare say that to me!" she said, slowly. "You talk of his fatherly love—you, the man who would have dishonoured him!"

"I tell you I shall deny it. You have been ill now for months, and Sir Harry will see that these are a sick woman's hysterical ravings."

"He will believe me," she reiterated.

"He will not, in the face of my solemn oath."

"Then the dead will speak from his grave when they search it—there, where you buried him that night in the solemn woods; where, hour by hour, the streams run whispering to the rustling reed and nodding fern the one word 'murder!' George Carleigh, flee for your life while there is time, lest you fall by his avenging hand!"

He sank back in his seat as Lady Fanshaw rose slowly from her chair and walked deliberately across the lawn to where the group sat in the sunshine of the soft, warm day.

"She cannot—she dare not; no, she will not tell him now!" panted Carleigh, as he saw Alice go straight up and stand with her hand resting upon her husband's shoulder.

He saw Sir Harry take her hand, and then, in imagination, he saw them alone, with her kneeling at his feet, confessing the whole of

the shameful story. He saw, too, Sir Harry in his rage—Sir Harry, so calm and quiet, who could be—as he recalled the scene with the dog—so firm and strong of will.

Carleigh shivered.

"He would shoot me like a dog!" he muttered. "I must go. My life will not be safe here."

"Curse her thin, frightened face! She recoils from me every time we meet!" he muttered through his teeth. "She hates me as much as I hate her now. I wish I had never seen her. If she were not afraid of me, she'd tell all—everything. What a fool I have been! What an idiot!"

He sat back, biting his nails.

"I wish she were dead!"

He started as the thought came, and a strange look passed over his countenance when it was not twitched by the nervous affection that troubled him in moments of excitement.

"Yes," he said, softly; "self-preservation is the first law of nature! That might do."

CHAPTER LVIII.

CUTTING THE LION'S CLAWS.

A FALSE alarm! Range stood listening, his staff grasped in his hand, ready to strike; but the opportunity did not come: the door was not opened; and, after waiting patiently and growing calm as he did so, he hid his cudgel and threw himself on the bed with a weary sigh.

Hunger and weakness were telling upon him now, and so painful were the pangs he suffered that he was ready to chew pieces of his sponge and cast longing eyes upon the soap.

The sleeplessness was one of his greatest troubles; for he would lie for hours every night, suffering the painful, gnawing hunger; and, as is the case in such seasons of enforced abstinence, when he did fall asleep he was always dreaming of walking in glorious gardens where bright fruits of gold and purple hung temptingly down. At other times he would be revelling at some great banquet where the tables were spread with every luxury, and on these occasions he was always seated beside the woman of his love, and Judith Nesbitt was pressing him to eat. Then came the waking, and the strain upon mind and body was terrible.

He knew that his health was giving way, and that his habit of constantly talking to himself was a bad sign; so he determined, and forced himself, to be content with thinking.

"Talking aloud is the first step towards craziness," he reasoned; and so he thought of his future and his plans, instead of talking aloud.

Then, as a cheerful subject, his mind began to run upon the various prisoners again—the men of whom he had read, their sufferings, and how some of the Bastille people had been released at last quite mad.

"Talking aloud is a sign of madness," he said; "and some day I've got to prove that I am perfectly sane."

"I want exercise—that's it: something besides amusement—something that will tire me out. What shall I do?"

It took some little thinking, and he decided to see how many miles he could walk a day by drawing the bed forward so that he could walk round and round the room.

He made his calculations. The room was about twenty feet square, and, allowing for distance from the wall, furniture, and turns, he reckoned that one turn round was about twenty yards; five turns, a hundred; seventeen to eighteen hundred, a mile.

That was capital exercise for a time, but wearisome, and terribly like the work of the horses in the clay-mills in the great brick-fields.

He tried running, but it was difficult; still, he managed it a little, keeping on till the perspiration streamed down; and he soon began to glory in the success of his experiments, for sleep came at once to the wearied frame; his head felt clearer; and, above all, despondency, prone to attack him, came less often.

But it was horribly monotonous; and he was ready to throw it up, to give way to the longing for sitting moody and idle in his chair or lying on his bed. But he beat down the desire.

"They want to drive me melancholy mad, but they shall not. Exercise brings hope, and keeps me healthy and strong. I shall want my strength some day."

So he strode on, or ran round and round the room barefooted, so as to make no noise, always keeping an eye when he could upon the window, so that he might not be seen from the garden.

Then he took up another form of exercise, strengthening the muscles of his arms by holding out chairs at arm's length, or balancing them upon his palm. Then trying two at once. Another time he gathered himself together to bound over bed or chairs, put himself into attitudes as a wrestler might, and performed feats that he laughed over as he did them, bending down gymnastically, and poising himself on his hands and one leg, or on hands and the tips of his toes.

"If any one could see me," he said to himself, "he would thoroughly believe I was mad."

This was said merrily as he stopped, panting, after running round the room on all-fours like an animal, and, leaping over a chair, laid prostrate on the floor.

Another time he would practise crawling on his chest, after the fashion in which he had seen the Indians creep on some unfortunate's trail.

This was splendid exercise, and it set him as well thinking about the escape Uncle Wash and he had had in Colorado.

That too was good; for the thought of Uncle Wash was now his great hope.

"Once get the year past, and the old boy will be over. I'm

missing, and he'll lay himself out to find me; and he will—alive or dead."

This was a gloomy idea—this last, and Range felt depressed; but he brightened up directly.

"If they've killed me he'll about kill them for it," he thought.

"But they won't kill me," he said, with a laugh that was hopeful; for until he had taken to this exercise he had not smiled for a couple of months. "They will not kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. They'll only try all they can—feeding and starving—to make me lay."

Of late he had seemed so weak and helpless that for many nights he had not been strapped down, though his gaolers were very erratic in that; and he had carried on the ruse so well, seeming inert and wretched in their presence, and flaccid of muscle when he was touched, that one day they showed themselves really off their guard, and Range set apart the next morning for his first attempt.

His plan was very simple: to be found seated at the foot of his bed when his breakfast was brought; to let his captors pass him, and then, at the first opportunity, seize his bludgeon, strike down the man who opposed him, dash through the door, fasten it, and get away.

He felt sure of finding clothes in the hall, enough for his purpose; and if Sarah Pannell interfered—well, he could easily master her.

He knew that the poor living had told upon him, but not so much as might have been supposed—the exercise he had of late taken, with his window open, having been wonderfully restorative.

"I must be well up to the mark," he said to himself, his eyes sparkling with excitement at the idea of the coming fray; and, about an hour after he had been left alone, he started up and began to exercise his muscles, walking, running, silently swinging chairs, leaping the bedstead to and fro with the lightness and activity of some feline creature; and as the gentle perspiration came from his pores his brain grew clear and he smiled.

"Nothing like very light feeding and plenty of exercise to make a man strong and well," he said, giving his arms a windmill-like swing, and then throwing himself into a series of postures that would have delighted a sculptor.

For he had hit upon the right way to give himself healthy sleep and combat the morbid growth that would have been his ruin.

"There!" he said at last, as he gave himself a final stretch. "I think that will do for to-day. I must——"

He paused, with the colour flushing to his temples, as he suddenly found himself confronting the sneering face of Mewburn at the open panel, that worthy having been calmly watching him through a crack for the past quarter of an hour.

The door was opened and the fellow entered, followed by Sheldrake and Pannell.

"No, you don't!" exclaimed Mewburn, making a pounce at the foot of the bed. "Hold him, Jack! That's better! Now what do

you think of your invalid? I was starving him to death—was I? Pretty pair of managers you are! If it hadn't been for me, one of us would have had his skull fractured. Nice tool that for a sick man!"

He held out the stout chair-leg as Pannell secured Range, the struggle he had made for his weapon being of brief duration, Sheldrake having seized one arm, Pannell the other.

"Had too much strait-waistcoat—hasn't he, Jack Pannell, eh?"

"Drop that!" said Sheldrake, sternly.

"Well, then, my dear Mr. Frank Range, I think in the future you had better take my advice—the advice of me, Doctor Parkins—and let me reduce our patient as I please. If you had done as I had wished you, and brother John there had not been always putting in his sickly foolery, the man would have been well by now. There! put on that thing again!"

"No!" said Pannell, stoutly. "He's had enough of that. Let the poor beggar alone."

"What! are you going to back out?" cried Mewburn, fiercely.

"Did you ever know me back out when I said I'd join you?" cried Pannell. "There! loose him, Shell. Here, you Range, it's of no good to show fight; we're too many for you, and you'll only get hurt. You'd better give in."

He loosed his hold and gave Range a thrust forward, Sheldrake making no opposition.

"Oh, well! If it's coming to this——" began Mewburn, angrily.

"That will do, doctor; there is no occasion to quarrel! You don't want to lose your fees any more than you want to lose your patient. Jack, my dear brother, you have been a little too sympathetic! We must give the doctor his own way."

"Mighty ingenious!" continued Sheldrake, examining the bludgeon, and then taking up the chair in the corner to which it belonged. "This would not have happened if the room had been cleaned and examined as usual."

He gave the chair a stamp, and it fell to pieces.

"I suppose," continued Sheldrake, "your dear wife, Jack, was afraid that our dear brother's heart might be susceptible to the charms of our sweet maid. She must resume her duties all the same. Doctor, you must make your medicine a little stronger; your patient's body is gaining vigour at the expense of his brain, or he would never have conceived such an insane notion as to meditate an attack upon his friends, so as to expose himself downstairs to being hunted by a couple of very ferocious dogs. Besides which, you remember the notice we gave at the police-station in case of an escape."

Range set his teeth.

"Ah! my dear brother," continued Sheldrake, "you don't know what pains we have taken to ensure your restoration to health. The moment your plethora—as Doctor Parkins here calls it—is relieved,

you will be a recovered man. Come along now, and let the girl tidy this room after breakfast to-morrow."

"A failure!" said Range, as soon as he was alone, Pannell going out last with the wrecked chair. "Never mind: success is built on failures; but are they going to starve me more?"

CHAPTER LIX.

A NEW VERSION OF POPE.

"I THOUGHT you had gone, Jane," said Range, as soon as he was alone with the maid next morning, after submitting patiently to the pinioning that followed a miserably meagre meal, and a laughing remark from Sheldrake that a good tight strap across the waist was a capital thing to fall back on when your breakfast was light.

"Gone? No," said the girl, bustling about and working hard; "but don't you talk so loud. My poor 'art's been nigh broke about you. It's been 'orrid! I thought they was going to starve you to death, and that I was never going to see you no more, and just, too, when you'd arst me for a lock o' my hair."

Range's eyes dilated a little at this, and he noted a certain smartness in the girl that had not existed before. Her hair was bright and neat, and, though her hands were horribly chapped and dirty, her face was shiny and clean; so was her cotton dress, which was tightly drawn in at the waist, as if the wearer were trying to achieve something in the nature of a figure.

"Have you got it stil?" said Jane, giving a tremendous swoop with her broom, as if she were an agricultural labourer mowing dust.

"Got what?"

"That lock of my hair."

"Yes; I have it," said Range, coldly, as he recalled the folly of his experiment. "Do you want it back?"

"Why, of course not!" said Jane, making the table scroop loudly as she dragged it over the bare boards.

"Why, I do declare, yours is getting quite long!"

"What, my hair?"

"Yes, 'most half an inch, that it is; and your beard too; but the barber, Mr. Gentles, is coming agen to-day."

"The deuce he is!"

"Yes; I heard Mr. Frank tell the butcher to ask him to call. He wants to look at you."

"Who does?"

"The butcher. I told him if he climbed up the wall he could see you any day."

"You told him that?" said Range, with a throb of the heart.

"Yes. You arn't offended, are you?"

"No, not a bit. Tell him to come—often."

"He said he'd never seen a mad gentleman, and he should like to."

"Ah!"

"What's the matter, Mr. Arthur, sir?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing."

"But you give quite a groan like."

"Did I?"

"Yes; and I know what's the matter," whispered the girl; "you're hungry, and I've got a big meat turnover for you in my pocket."

"You have?"

"Yes, a big 'un. Where shall I slip it?"

"In the table drawer, while you are dusting it. There, do it now, with your back to the door, in case any one is watching."

"Oh! no one's watching," said Jane. "They're all downstairs," and she slipped something in a paper bag into the drawer. "I'll make you lots of things if you like. Shall I?"

"If you want to keep me from being starved to death, pray do; and as soon as I get my liberty I'll give you such a present!"

"There—stop!" cried the girl, thumping down her broom and sweeping furiously. "If you say a word about money, which you haven't got, to me, I won't make you a thing. Just as if I wanted to be paid that way!"

Jane swept about with tremendous energy, and just then the panel was softly opened and closed again, as if the inspector was satisfied.

"I asked Ike how I was to manage to give you something more to eat."

"Who?"

"Isaac."

"Whos' he?"

"The butcher. He said you ought to have lots o' chops and steaks to make you well, for he didn't hold with doctors."

"Well?" said Range, for there was an interregnum of cleaning.

"He said he'd show me how to do it, and he give me the bag and bit of string I've got in my pocket."

"String and bag?"

"Yes; and he said if I give 'em to you you could let the bag down every night, and I could put something in."

"And will you?"

"Of course I will. It makes me miserable to be eating and stuffing myself, and knowing you're up here starving. Here, I shall put the bag in here between the mattress and pallyass. Now, I mustn't talk any more."

Jane began to sing, and as she sang and worked another inspection was made through the panel, luckily for Range, just at the right time.

The girl's face was now averted, and Range was lying hopefully thinking of how, with a fresh supply of provisions, he could hold out till help came, when Jane said, softly—

"I shan't come to-night, because you've got the turnover; but I shall to-morrow night as soon as it's dark."

"That's right, and bless that butcher," said Range.

"Yes, he is a nice chap," said Jane, hiding her face and giggling.

"He wants to be my sweetheart."

"And is he going to be?"

"Why, of course not. I don't care for him a bit. You shouldn't!"

"Shouldn't what?"

"Arst such questions."

"Oh, very well, Jane, I won't."

"You may if you like, though. I won't be cross."

"That's a comfort," said Range to himself.

"I say, why don't you make haste and get well?"

"I am well."

"Oh, no, you're not! You're very bad sometimes, but—but it isn't about that lady, is it?"

"Lady? What lady?"

"That you went mad about."

"I did not go mad about any lady, you silly girl. It's all their talk."

"And you ain't engaged to anybody at all?"

"Of course not, my girl."

Jane heaved a gentle little sigh, and then made a furious attack upon some chairs and the drawers, polished the glass, and then began to behave in a very mysterious manner, and with her face furiously red.

She took up her broom, gave a few thumps with it against the skirting-board, and began to sing very loudly, opening the door suddenly, putting the broom outside, and banging it to once more, to begin foraging in her pocket for something, and bringing forth a pair of scissors, a thimble, and a bit of wax.

These two last pocket-dwellers she replaced, and, armed with the scissors, her face now scarlet, and a curiously determined look in her eyes, she stepped quickly to the bedside.

"What are you going to do, girl?" cried Range, wonderingly.

"Never you mind; I ain't a-going to kill you. Now, you hold still. It's no use to waggle your head about. I don't see why the barber should mess that all over with soap and throw it away."

To his astonishment, and before he could thoroughly realise her intention, Jane took hold of one of his ears, and passed the scissors cleverly behind it; there were a couple of snips, and then a rough finger and thumb were passed over his scalp, as if Jane were taking a pinch of snuff, which she carefully deposited—a little dust of brown hair—in a bit of curl-paper, screwed it up, and thrust it into her bosom.

"Are you mad?" he exclaimed, as he lay there perfectly helpless, and staring.

"No, I ain't, but you are till you get better. It was longest just there, but it's terrible short. I don't mind, though. P'r'aps you wouldn't have given it me if I'd arst you. Don't look at me so cross as that."

Jane's remarks were cut short by footsteps, and she flew to the drawers, to begin dusting as the trio entered the room.

"Nearly, done, girl?"

"Yes, sir, I've just about done," replied Jane; and soon after she

quitted the room Range was set free and left to his thoughts, which were of anything but a pleasant nature, till he forced himself to believe that it was only out of pity.

"I ought hardly to let her supply me with food," he thought. "I'll throw it to the dogs."

He went to the drawer and took out the paper bag, opened it, and found it contained a very savoury-looking composition of pastry and meat.

Then, from between mattress and paillasse, he took out a little linen bag made of holland. Very neatly attached to this was a long string made up of many pieces of different thicknesses knotted together, while inside there was a piece of something like crackling paper.

Note-paper it was, and on being taken out Range found written in a curious hand the directions for use—

"Hanget outer window."

Range concealed this new form of parcels post, smiling sadly, and then turned to his pastry.

"I'm only human—very human indeed," he said, bitterly. "Perhaps a hero would act differently. I'm half starved, and I must eat."

The bull-dogs were down below as he walked to the window, and saluted him with a good bay.

Perhaps if he had divided the pasty between them they might have been more friendly; but somehow they did not get a taste, the few crumbs that were left at the end of ten minutes being placed for the sparrows on the sill.

CHAPTER LX.

A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING.

THERE was a tremendous peal from the boudoir, the bell ringing incessantly till Josephs the butler rushed in without knocking, and found Sir Harry bending over Lady Fanshaw, who was lying fixed of eye and insensible upon the couch.

"Send Miss Judith here. Send off a man to Brackley at full gallop for Doctor Murray. Quick, man! Quick!"

The trembling butler met Judith on the stairs and told the news, and she ran at once to the boudoir.

"Oh, uncle!" she cried, "what is it?"

"I don't know, my child. I came up a few minutes ago and knocked. Alice did not answer, and I came in. She was lying on the floor."

"Here, fan her face, uncle!" cried Judith, beating and rubbing her cousin's palms. "It is a fainting fit. She has been so weak and low lately. Had she been out?"

"No, my dear. She came up an hour ago to write some letters. She has written two, you see."

He pointed to the table, where a couple of freshly-directed envelopes were lying.

"Ring again, my child. Tell George to see that the man is off at once. No, run and ask him to go."

Judith ran out, after tearing at the bell, and met her cousin, who had only returned from town the day before after a run up on business.

"What is the matter?" he cried anxiously.

"Alice—some terrible seizure."

"Not dead?" he panted.

"No, no! No, no! Uncle wishes——. Go yourself and fetch the doctor."

Carleigh snatched his hat from the stand and a whip from where it hung and ran out, just in time to shout to and stop the groom, who was starting on the road.

He ran after him, made the man dismount, and Judith saw him jump on the horse's back, put him at the hedge, and, ignoring the road, go off at full gallop cross country, taking wall, ditch, and streamlet as they came in his way, and by so doing promising to save a couple of miles.

It was a long and weary time of waiting before the doctor could arrive—a time of agony to Sir Harry as he knelt beside the couch, nolding one clenched, cold hand, and with Judith trying from time to time to administer stimulants, water, anything to revive the sufferer, who lay just breathing heavily, and now and then heaving a sigh that was almost a moan.

"How long—how long—how long?" groaned Sir Harry. "Oh, my darling, if I could bear it for you—if I could give my old, useless life for yours! Judith, my child, I cannot bear it! What does it mean?"

At last! The low, firm voice below, the few quick inquiries, and then, while every one else was hurried and excited, the calm, firm step and the cool, studied manner, as the man, who had, as if by a miracle, brought poor Burton back to life, stood in the room.

He asked but few questions, and his examination was but short, so short that Sir Harry looked at him angrily.

"Brain, Sir Harry," he said in answer to a sharp inquiry. "I can tell you no more now, I must watch the development of the case. I may tell you though I am not much surprised. Lady Fanshaw has been delicate for months."

Judith was waiting at the door for the earliest news, and when Sir Harry came out for an instant to give some fresh order that the doctor wished to be fulfilled she learned all there was to know, and ran down to bear the bulletin to her Uncle Robert.

At the stairs though she was waylaid by Carleigh, who was pacing the hall.

"Well," he said, "what is it?"

His voice was so strange and harsh that Judith looked at him wonderingly, to see that there were dark lines beneath his eyes, and that he was ghastly pale.

Carleigh's aspect quite startled Judith for the moment.

"An attack of brain-fever, I am afraid," she said, putting that interpretation upon the doctor's words.

"But not dangerous?" cried Carleigh. "Don't tell me that her life is in danger."

"I think not," replied Judith, wondering at his excitement, "but we must wait and see."

"Thank heaven there is hope then!" he cried excitedly. "What a terrible blow! And Sir Harry?"

"Don't question me more," said Judith passionately. "I am ill and hysterical myself, this has shocked me so. I want to go on to Uncle Robert; pray don't stop me, George."

He drew back to let her pass, and remained pacing up and down the hall till the doctor came softly out of the boudoir and descended to the drawing-room.

"How is she, doctor?" cried Carleigh.

"Hush, my dear sir! Silence, please. Very seriously ill, but we must hope. She has had what seems to be a second seizure, and is now resting."

"But tell me, doctor, you don't think there is danger?"

"I think there is very grave danger," replied the doctor; "and, if there is no change for the better soon, I am going to send to town at once for Sir Archibald Lane."

"It is very terrible, doctor," said Carleigh, who still held hat and whip in hand, while his clothes and even his face were splashed with soil.

He followed the doctor into the drawing-room, and stood watching him as he walked thoughtfully to the window and stood looking out.

Doctor Murray remained in this position some ten minutes or so, and then, turning, he met an inquiry made by Carleigh with a bow, and left the room.

Carleigh was leaning up against a low bookcase; and, as he watched the doctor leaving the room without making any reply to his words, he turned ghastly pale, and once more went through the habit of moistening his parched lips with his tongue.

As he stood there leaning back against the case his right knee trembled violently and agitated a china ornament upon the ledge, so that it rattled and made him move hastily away.

As he crossed the room he caught sight of his ghastly face in one of the mirrors, and uttered an ejaculation of surprise and annoyance as he strove to compose his features.

Then with a half-laugh he uttered the one word "sympathy," and went into the hall, where he found Sir Robert, who nodded to him gravely.

They were never very intimate, though living in the same house, and for a few moments the old general seemed more distant than ever.

But it was not in the old man's nature to maintain resentment at a

time like this ; and calling to mind the eagerness with which Carleigh had gone off for help, he turned back to speak to him.

"Terrible affair this, Carleigh," he said.

Then he stopped and hesitated, made as if to speak, hesitated again, and then, as if his mind was made up, signed to Carleigh to follow him into the library.

"Look here, George Carleigh," he said, "I'm a plain-spoken man, and I'm going to keep up my character. Just answer me a question. Whatever you say will be sacred even if I don't like it, but the doctor's a bit puzzled for the cause of Lady Fanshaw's seizure. Have you and she been having words to-day?"

"Sir Robert——"

"No nonsense, my lad. This is perhaps a case of life and death. I know you two have had words together."

"Sir Robert!" said Carleigh again.

"I've heard you," said Sir Robert sternly. "Now speak out, man, plainly. Have you two had words to-day?"

"No, Sir Robert, we have not," cried Carleigh, indignantly. "What do you mean?"

"That I don't want to hurt my brother's feelings, and so I see much and say nothing. You declare to me then that you have not spoken to Lady Fanshaw to-day?"

"You heard what I said to her at breakfast, Sir Robert," said Carleigh coldly. "If you do not like me, sir, you need not hit upon a time of trouble like this to insult me."

"I tell you this, young man," said Sir Robert sternly, "that were it not that I love my brother too well to wish to cause him pain, and that I have for some time past seen that Lady Fanshaw has treated you with the contempt you deserve, nothing would have kept me silent—I should have forgotten that I was comparatively a visitor here, and have had you kicked off the premises."

"Sir Robert Fanshaw!"

"Captain Carleigh, do you suppose I am blind?"

"Sir Robert, there are those who see too much."

"I'm not one of them, young man, but I am one who rather likes to let troubles settle themselves if they will."

"You have never liked me, Sir Robert," said Carleigh bitterly.

"Never, sir," said the bluff old general heartily, "and I should never have stopped here only I saw that my niece was not likely to accept you, and, as I said before, the trouble of my brother wishing to see a match between you two was sure to settle itself."

"And you have set Miss Nesbitt against me."

"There never was any need, sir."

"And now you choose this time for an open quarrel."

"Quarrel? Not I. There is a sort of truce between us. If it were a quarrel, Captain Carleigh, you would find the difference, for I should carry on the war with vigour or else retreat. Now take my advice, when Lady Fanshaw is better, remember who she is and what your position is here. There, we understand each other, I think, now."

Sir Robert left the captain to his own thoughts, and waited about till he could hear from Judith that Lady Fanshaw was recovering from her attack, and had sunk into a deep sleep.

After this he went slowly to his own room with a very thoughtful look.

"This is not natural," he said. "I am sure there is something wrong."

CHAPTER LXI.

LIGHT THROUGH THE CLOUDS.

MEWBURN could not understand it, and he reduced Range's supplies more and more; but, though the prisoner looked pale and assumed a certain amount of feebleness, he held out, and weeks and weeks glided by without result.

At times there was a great change in the meals, as if some one's counsels prevailed, and for a few days the prisoner would be well fed; but soon after, the starvation-diet recommenced, and during these seasons Jane's string and bag were lowered from the window night after night, to be drawn up again after a silent tug, the bag laden with cake or turnover. Sometimes it would be carefully-cut sandwiches, sometimes only bread and butter. Once only an extremely hard, sour apple-pudding.

One day Range was at the window, gazing out at the brickfield, and thinking of the many passages of arms he had had with his enemies, and the way in which of late he had refused to even speak.

He was satisfied that they were determined to keep him until he gave way; and, though he kept watching for a means of escape, and tried Jane again and again, he knew that his position hung upon Uncle Wash coming to England and tracking him out.

Sarah Pannell had twice renewed her proposals to him, and departed with bitter threats, which were followed each time by an absence of food for two days—little facts which pointed, so Range thought, to her powers down below.

Jane seemed quite satisfied with the stolen scrap of hair, and came and chatted as before.

Once she made a rather pointed allusion to some day when the patient got well—one which Range choose not to understand,—and as a corrective talked about the butcher, taking himself to task afterwards about his weakness, when he knew at heart that, but for the girl's kindness, he must have given up or starved.

"I shall have to promise her marriage," he said, laughingly, one day; "then she will help me to escape, and I shall take her home with me and astonish Uncle Wash with the appearance of my bonny bride."

In pursuance of which idea he was exceedingly cold—cross, she called it—next time Jane came to clean up—behaviour which she considered rather cruel after bringing him quite a goodly cake.

"He said he should come and have a look at you to-day," she whispered, just before leaving.

"What! the butcher?"

Jane nodded, and Sheldrake opened the door, told him as usual not to hurry himself about getting well, only they were waiting; and once more he was alone, spending his time in thinking about Judith, watching his sparrows, making impossible plans for escape, and wondering whether Uncle Wash would come.

"If it were not for this hope," he said, gloomily, "I think I should be tempted to bring it all to an end by hanging myself."

When this thought came to him he felt, as it were, fascinated, and as he gazed at the iron cross part of the bars he seemed to see himself busily preparing to end his career with one of the straps that had so often held him down.

Range started from his seat with a sobbing cry, covered his face with his hands, and staggered to his bedside to sink upon his knees.

"No, no, no, not that!" he cried passionately. "Let all go—every dollar I own; not that, not that!"

He knelt there, trembling with horror at the strange power the idea had had over him, and for the first time he realised the effect of his long confinement, and how it was that poor wretches shut up alone had grown weaker of intellect, till at last the brain gave way and they took refuge in suicide.

"I must do something!" he cried, as he sprang to his feet. "They are driving me mad. When will help come?"

He paced his room till he panted, and threw himself into his chair to rest.

"I had better give up," he said, "before my brain does go and a worse fate befalls me than even being beggared for life."

He grew calmer by degrees; but every now and then a shudder ran through him and a great horror of the coming night was upon him.

He fixed his eyes upon the great blank waste of the brickfield and longed for the time when he should be able to see his fellow-men busy once more—anything to divert his thoughts.

"If some motive would only possess me," he thought; "something to do, something to expect;" for he had exhausted, it seemed every means of amusing himself and every plan for his escape.

As he sat there all at once he caught a glimpse of something glistening beyond the wall. It seemed to be wet and black and shiny, just level with the top bricks, and then it disappeared suddenly.

It was something to take his attention and relieve his overstrained brain; but several minutes passed, and it did not reappear, but left him puzzled and wondering what it could be, when all at once it was there again, and he saw a pair of red hands passed over the wall.

Then the shiny appearance developed itself into the very smooth, round, greasy head of a man with a low forehead, and below the forehead a pair of very bright black eyes.

"It's the butcher," said Range to himself; and a visit from a king would hardly have given him a more pleasurable emotion; for this man had expressed an interest in him and prescribed that for which he often experienced intense longing—strong food. He was Jane's

lover too, and perhaps he might be satisfied about the question of sanity and aid him to escape.

Range felt that he must be careful; for he had had to submit again to the skilful fingers of Mr. Gentles, and he knew how appearances were against him.

"How are you?" came just then in a low voice, as the head seemed to go back and the lips were raised to the level of the top bricks.

"Quite well. Tired of being shut up," said Range, in the same low tone of voice.

"Got any 'bacco?"

Range nodded.

"I say, are you getting all right?" came again.

Range nodded again, hesitated, and then said aloud—

"Help me to get away."

He spoke too loud. There was a rush of feet on the gravel, a loud baying from the dogs at him; for they did not see the butcher, who dropped at once and disappeared. It seemed, though, that he had not been heard in the house, and all that day the prisoner was tortured by hopes and doubts.

"Why, I could make that man happy with money to the end of his days, and now he has satisfied his curiosity by seeing me, poor bare idiot that I look, he will not come again."

So he said; but Hope told a flattering tale that the time was approaching when Uncle Wash said he would come and seek him, and he believed that his friend would again show himself above the wall.

CHAPTER LXII.

AN INTERRUPTED GAME.

It was one fine spring morning that Range stood with an arm through the bars of his prison, scattering crumbs for his pets. He had been very low-spirited of late; for the whim had seized his gaolers to keep Jane away once more, so he had no further news of the butcher, who seemed to have forgotten him.

The morning was delicious, and he was beginning to be hopeful of not having to suffer more from the bitter cold that had kept him pacing his room so many hours a day. It was one of those halcyon times when the east winds have gone, and nature is putting on her robe of delicate green—when a scent that is as the odour of growing life is in the air, and the prisoner behind the bars felt that even there it was a pleasure to live.

The old garden looked very beautiful, for John Pannell had been busy clearing away the last traces of wintry wreck, and the intense desire to be even there, shut in by the high walls, was at times almost unbearable.

A loud twittering suddenly arose on the housetop, and he drew back from the window, when the pretty slight-looking little grey sparrow came fluttering down and settled upon the sill, to begin

picking up the tinier pieces of crumb, raising her head each moment, to watch him with her dark, bead-like eye.

"Why, you little beauty," he said, "who can think a sparrow ugly?"

The sparrow looked up at him as if it understood his words, and he took a step forward.

The bird's wings made a fluttering noise, and she rose in the air, to fly up over his head out of sight.

"You're as bad as little Judith," he said, bitterly. "Good friends as long as I keep my distance: ready to fly if I approach."

He sighed and walked back, to stand leaning against the foot of his bed, gazing half vacantly out of the window, when the sparrow flew down again, and went on feeding upon the crumbs.

"Out upon you, little coquette!" he said, with the smile coming back to his face, so interesting was even the smallest incident in his weary prison life. "Judith—Judy—little Judy!" he said; and he uttered a chirruping noise with his lips, which made the bird raise itself to its full height and look at him in a half-wondering, half-frightened way, till, hearing no more, it went on picking up the crumbs till it was satisfied and flew away.

Then came half-a-dozen more, among which was a sturdy-looking, handsome little cock-bird in his full spring uniform. His under parts were of delicate grey, his head and back a rich chestnut, and beneath his beak there was the blackest of black patches, like an old-fashioned satin stock.

There was something so ridiculous in the airs and graces of the little bird as it hopped about, set itself up, and chirruped loudly, that Range burst out into a hearty laugh.

"By all that's wonderful," he cried, "how that little rascal puts me in mind of the captain! I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he were to marry little Judy. Well, that is strange!"

He did not laugh now, but stood as if he were struck by the coincidence; for just then the little delicate-looking grey hen-bird that he had fed flew down and hopped shrinkingly away as the dapper little cock-bird began to chirrup more loudly and displayed his feathers. He set up his crest and the glossy feathers at his throat, and if ever bird said, "Look here, little one, see what a fine fellow I am: you won't see my equal anywhere," it was just then.

All at once there was a whirl of wings, and they were all gone, a loud chirruping in the cedar telling their destination.

"I must be getting childish," said Range, as he walked to the window once more, thrust his arm through the bars, and stood there in his favourite attitude. "What a state my brain must be in!—naming sparrows, and thinking they resemble people I don't like, or do like. Is this one of the first steps towards idiocy consequent upon solitary confinement?"

He shuddered as he recalled the horrible thought that had once attacked him.

"Pish! how absurd! It amuses me, and will keep me from thinking."

"Hallo!" came from below.

He looked down, and there was Pannell with a rake in his hand.

"Well? Hallo!" said Range, roughly.

"Don't be huffy, man, when one wants to be civil. Have a cigar?"

It was upon Range's lips to say *no* indignantly, but in his way Pannell kept on showing a bluff kind of *bonhomie*, and there was something of the big frank boy in his composition that was likeable. What was more, in spite of fresh struggles, and more than one savage blow, he did not, even directly after, when he was sore, display the slightest malice.

"Throw it up," said Range; "but I have no light."

Pannell took a vesuvian out of a little box, a cigar out of his case, and stuck the match right in the end of the roll of weed, burying the wood to the little composition bulb.

"Now then, catch!" he said; and he dexterously pitched up the cigar over and over again, with the most exemplary patience, till it was caught.

It took a good many trials before this was achieved; but when it was Jack Pannell gave a sigh of content, went out of sight for a few minutes, and returned with a folding-chair, which he spread and then sat down.

"Bit tired, old fellow," he said. "I'll join you in a smoke."

He lit up most deliberately and sat back, staring up at Range, who also lit up and stared down.

"Can't ask you down, old fellow," said Pannell, after a few minutes' silence. "My garden begins to look splendid."

Range did not reply.

"I'd ask you down if I could," he said; "but they wouldn't like it."

Range smoked on, feeling indignant, but at the same time his heart throbbed with satisfaction. There was something so pleasurable in listening to the human voice pitched in a friendly tone.

"I say, old fellow," said Pannell, at last, "aren't you getting tired of it all?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you throw up the sponge?"

"Because I'm not beaten."

"Ah! I'd give it up now. You wouldn't feel the loss a bit. Give in and put an end to it."

"Jack Pannell," said Range, "you're a confounded blackguard!"

"Thankye. That's your opinion."

"And your own, too," said Range; "but you're a good, manly sort of scoundrel, and I don't know that I dislike you so very much."

"Come, that's flattering," laughed Pannell. "But it won't do. Soft sawder, my boy!"

"I mean what I say," continued Range. "Oh, no! I was not going to flatter you, you great ugly watchdog! I know you wouldn't give way. That's why I like you."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I like you because you are a good honest sort of scoundrel, and I like your fidelity to all about you."

"More sawder!"

"Oh! call it so if you like; but I was going to say to you that you are as stubborn and bull-headed as I am, and if you were in my place you'd just say that you'd die before you would give in."

Pannell chuckled, and sent forth large puffs of smoke.

"So, I shall not give in, and you may tell your friends so."

"Tell 'em yourself," said Pannell, gruffly; "only you've got the worst of it. Cigar good?"

"Capital!"

"Then let's smoke and talk about something else. I say, I don't want to be too hard on you. They wouldn't like it if they knew; but I don't mind getting you anything you want in reason."

"Will you?"

"Yes," said Pannell, thoughtfully; "more books, or cigars, or papers. I shan't get you centre-bits and files and rope-ladders," he added, with a laugh.

"Get me some books, then."

"All right. Here, I say, they're gone out for the day; what do you say to a hand at cards?"

"Cards? Well, no, Master Jack Pannell. It is too expensive a game to play with you."

"Oh! I won't fleece you," was the reply. "I want a game."

"What! are you coming up here?"

"No; it's understood that we all pay our visits together. Couldn't come up."

"Honour among thieves, eh?"

"Oh, go on! I don't mind what you call me. I can't hit a man when he's down. Are you going to play?"

"How can we?"

"Two packs. I'll throw you up one, and we can each deal for ourselves."

Range nodded, and Pannell went in and returned with a couple of packs of cards, one of which was tightly tied with string, and this he dexterously threw up.

"There, sit on your window-sill and deal for yourself, and I'll deal for myself; only mind this: I can't see what you play, so be square."

"You may trust me," said Range, coldly, as Pannell seated himself in his sight. Then each party dealt and took up his cards, and as Range began to arrange his he nearly dropped them, for, right behind where Pannell was seated, he saw the black, well-pomatumed head of the butcher slowly rise above the wall, making a sign and holding up something wrapped up in paper, something long, and about the size of a table-knife.

"I hope it isn't a knife," thought Range. "Often enough, if I'd had a bowie, I should have felt ready to use it."

The butcher held up the packet again.

"Your play!" cried Pannell. "My word! what a hand! You get all the luck. What's that?"

He started up, for he had heard a slight noise behind him, and just then the two dogs, which had been lying asleep, started up, baying furiously.

Pannell threw down his cards, ran to the end of the house, and at the close of two or three minutes appeared again with a short ladder, which he reared up against the wall, climbed up quickly, and looked over to right and left.

"No one," he muttered, descending the ladder, and then, throwing it down, he ran forward into the front, right to the gate, and looked out there.

"Nothing," he muttered, for he had not been in time to see the butcher dart out into the brickfield, enter one of the huts, and settle himself down there to wait till he could retreat.

From his hiding-place he could see Pannell's head come above the wall and then disappear, for the great fellow to make his appearance again at the iron gates, and stay some few minutes, as if puzzled, before going in.

There was to be no game of cards that afternoon, for directly after Sheldrake and Mewburn returned; so Pannell hastily gathered up his pack—"to avoid a row," as he muttered to himself—and then, with a nod to Range, he went in, leaving the prisoner in an intense state of excitement to know what the butcher meant, and what the packet contained.

He sat there hour after hour watching the wall, but there was no further sign, and once more, in an intense state of misery, he noted the darkening sky, and wondered whether he could enjoy forgetfulness for a short time, or whether he would be tossing sleeplessly, thinking of Judith and the pleasant days he had spent at the Priory.

"That fellow means to send me his packet by Jane to-night!" he cried, suddenly starting up, with a strange feeling of elation, as the idea flashed through his brain.

No: the wish was father to the thought; it was not likely—but somehow he could not get it out of his head. The man was Jane's friend. He had expressed a desire to see him—why not to help? Perhaps he would; and, in spite of the mental cold water Range kept throwing upon the idea, it became more and more fixed in his brain that the bag, when it was lowered and drawn up that night, would contain the packet held up to him over the wall.

After what seemed an interminable length of time, Range rose from his seat and softly raised his window. All was still, and the stars seemed to be shining down through so much transparent darkness.

Taking the bag and string from the place where he kept them hidden, he lowered them down—fishing as he called it, with a miserable attempt at mirth,—and waited for a bite.

He waited for quite an hour before he heard a light step, his hearing being quickened by the strain laid upon it. Then the string quivered, and he knew as well as if he could see her that Jane was slipping in a paper containing food, and the packet he had been shown. He felt sure of that.

Then came the signal tug, and he began to draw up, when simultaneously there was a scuffle, a rush, Jane's voice uttered the words "Oh, you wretch!" and the string was nearly drawn from his hands.

CHAPTER LXIII.

"AT LAST!"

AT that moment Range felt that the means of communication between him and the girl had been discovered, for he heard her retreat, and the string was snatched again and again.

"I may get it away," he thought, and he gave the string, which fortunately was pretty strong, two or three sharp tugs.

To his amazement, instead of a voice bidding him let go, for the game was played out, there came up a fierce growling; and it dawned upon him that one of the watch-dogs had been tempted by the contents of the packet, and had seized it in his teeth.

"Oh, if that's it!" thought Range, "now comes the tug of war. Will the string and bag hold out?"

He reached as far as he could, and snatched and jerked to try and extricate the bag, but only elicited growl after growl, as the stubborn beast held on; and at last, taking firm hold with both hands, Range began to draw steadily on the string, under the impression that as soon as the dog felt itself a little raised at the head it would leave go.

The growling ceased, but the dog held on, and actually suffered itself to be lifted right off the ground. Then, all at once, the tension ceased, and the string came up readily.

"The brute!" muttered Range, and he rapidly drew up the string and felt for the bag; but only the tape loop was there.

Range gave an impatient stamp on the floor and stood listening at the window, but in vain. Though he stayed there for a full hour not a sound reached his ear, and at last, in despair, he threw himself upon the bed and vainly tried to sleep.

The next morning, unexpectedly, Jane was ushered into the room, to go through her regular cleaning performance; but either one or other of the gang, as Range had come to dub them, remained in the room. Several times over the girl gave him a meaning look, and laid her hand upon her heart—a proceeding which Range interpreted to mean either that she had a pain there or something concealed.

He hoped the latter, and so it proved, for, left alone with him for a few moments, she snatched a long thin packet from her breast and thrust it under the pillow.

"Another bag," she whispered. "That nasty dog got it last night, and the bit of chicken; but he brought it into my kitchen to eat, and I got that out of the bag again."

This was enigmatical; but it was all Range could learn till the room was cleaned, and he was once more alone.

It seemed an age before he was left, but at last he was free to

examine the packet, and, drawing it from beneath the pillow, he found something hard rolled up in a stout linen bag.

The bag was tied round this something hard with darning-cotton, a great deal being twisted about it in every direction, tantalising him till he could get it free, and then he found the contents in a piece of white paper.

"It is what he showed me over the wall!" cried Range, excitedly, and, unrolling the paper, he found what at first he imagined was a small table-knife, but which proved to be a strong three-cornered file, well set in its handle.

The prisoner's heart throbbed with delight. How many thousand dollars would he not have often given for such an implement as this! And now, as his fingers closed round the handle, he saw in its tiny, dark, keen teeth the path to freedom opening out, while his pulses throbbed wildly, and his breath came thick and fast.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon the dirty piece of writing-paper in his hand.

Yes: there was something written upon it in a clumsy thick hand.

Instructions—promises of help outside? He was going to be free at last; but he could not read, for he was weaker than he thought for. His brain swam, and a dizzy mist floated before his eyes.

He crossed to the washstand, drank some water with avidity, and then, trying to collect himself, he felt clearer, and read the paper, letting it fall directly after with a look of blank disappointment in his face.

The hieroglyphics were as follows:—

Mar. 3.—M.	6 $\frac{3}{4}$	...	...	...	...	5	7 $\frac{1}{2}$
,, 6.—Stk.	3 $\frac{1}{4}$	...	...	...	...	3	3
,, 9.—Chp.	...	...	...	...	...	1	7
,, 12.—2 Kid.	...	...	...	...	...	0	8

A butcher's memorandum where he had hoped for instructions and promises of help. But he felt that he must destroy that paper by tearing it into tiny bits and letting them blow away from the sill.

With this intention he picked it up and uttered a joyful cry. There was something on the other side, and, with the paper quivering in his hands, he read words prompted by a curious feeling of jealousy more than by a desire to help a fellow-creature, whom the writer wished to see far away on account of some one's sympathetic leanings interfering with the progress of his suit—

"I'm Gam to help you enny nite you can Get oute. i shal smok my pip outside reGlar."

"Heaven bless him!" cried Range. "Hurrah! At last! Now, you gang of scoundrels, my time has come! Thank God! thank God!—at last—at last!"

He threw up his arms in the frantic joy that possessed him, and then, in the thankfulness of his heart, clasped his hands, sank upon his knees by his bedside, and his lips moved silently.

For a minute or two only. The lowering diet, and the mental

anguish he had suffered, had told upon him terribly. He had felt the shadow envelop him time after time, and shrank from it—from the shadow of a benighted reason into the sunshine of an unclouded brain. He had fought against it whenever the horrible dread had approached, knowing that if he did not the solitary life he led would at last result in semi-idiotcy, if not in raving madness.

All this he had fought off, telling himself that he would yet find the means of getting free and winning in this desperate fight. And now at last the opportunity seemed to have come: that little file was the key that would unlock his prison and set him free—to give him that priceless boon whose value he had never before known.

"At last, at last!" he had cried, as he knelt to pour forth his thanks, and find that the long struggle had been too much—more than he could bear.

For, as he knelt, a strange swimming sensation once more attacked him; he felt that his senses were going; but in his agony of mind he started to his feet, clutched vainly at the air, reeled, and then fell heavily, the file dropping from his nerveless fingers with a loud tinkle on the floor.

The shock was sufficiently loud to be heard in the comfortable room where Sarah Pannell was reading a novel and Mewburn the paper, while Pannell and Sheldrake were engaged over a game at cards, which the latter dropped and rose at once to hurry towards the door.

CHAPTER LXIV.

RANGE THINKS IT OVER.

How long Range lay he did not know, but when at last he began to recover consciousness there was a deathly feeling of sickness oppressing him, and a vague knowledge that something was wrong; he did not know what, only that he was lying on the floor.

There was a sound, though, of some one coming. The doors were being unfastened; and then, as if through a haze, he saw Sheldrake and the others enter.

Just at that moment his memory flashed, and he recalled everything, and that he had had the file—the key to his prison—in his hands when the fainting fit came on.

Drawing himself up a little, his eyes fell upon it lying close to the bed, and with one hurried thrust of the foot he sent it further beneath as he tried to struggle up.

Then Pannell had him by the arms, and lifted him right on to the bed.

"You've overdone it. Poor beggar!" he growled. "I knew you'd go too far."

"Hold your tongue!" cried Sheldrake, fiercely. "How do you know it isn't a sham?"

"By this," said Pannell, laying his palm upon Range's forehead "Feel his hands."

Sheldrake took hold of the clammy, cold fingers and let them fall.

"Overdone, doctor," he said, quietly. "Go and get a little brandy or some wine."

Mewburn was about to object, but Sheldrake gave him so sharp a glance that he said, quickly—

"Oh, very well! As you please;" and he left the room.

"How are you now?" said Pannell. "Here, take a drop of this."

He filled and held a glass of water to Range's lips, and a portion was taken.

"There, you are better now, eh?" said Sheldrake.

"Yes; I'm better now," was the faint reply.

"What was it?—what was the matter?"

"What was the matter!" cried Range, with an indignant flash of the eye; and the words "You have half starved me" were on his lips, but he remembered the file, and that his policy was not to quarrel with these men now, but to get them away from the room. "Oh, nothing," he said. "A little faint. I am better now."

Just then Mewburn entered with a glass of wine, which Pannell caught from his hand, tasted, and held to Range, who drank it at once, feeling that if ever he wanted his strength it was now.

Then he let his head rest upon the pillow again, and lay watching his gaolers, wondering whether they would catch sight of the file where it lay beneath the bed.

They did not leave the room at once, but retired to the window, talking earnestly, so that he could not hear them; but Mewburn was protesting, and Sheldrake throwing in a word from time to time, while Pannell was silent.

All at once something that had been said roused the latter, for he brought down his great fist with a thump in his left hand.

"Look here," he cried, aloud, "I'm with you, mate to mate; but, if you think because I'm so quiet I'm a child, you're quite out of it."

"Nobody treats you as a child, Jack," protested Mewburn.

"Yes, they do—you do!" said the other, fiercely, for he was quite roused. "And now I'm going to have my say. Let's get what we want, and I'll wait for it with you if it's for years, but I'll not"—he cried, with an oath—"stand by and see that poor devil murdered!"

"Who's going to murder him, Jack? Don't be a fool!" cried Sheldrake, trying to pacify him.

"You are, by letting Nathan there work his will, and all as much out of spite as anything. Hasn't the poor beggar kicked me and knocked me about as much as either of you? Yes, twice as much, but I don't go kicking him for it again when he's down."

"Oh! I protest," said Mewburn.

"Yes, you may protest, but you have, and Shell here has let you, and all because he gave you a kick one day. Why, of course he did! So would any fellow in his position."

"Yes, yes! of course," said Sheldrake, hastily

"Now, just listen to me," said Pannell. "I'm not going to run back from what I undertook. I'm with you both to the end of it, and I shall take my share like a man; but I won't stand by and see that poor fellow treated like a dog, so there!"

"Come along down," said Sheldrake, who then crossed to Range. "How are you now?" he said.

"Weak and faint for want of proper food," was the reply.

"Then why not give in, man? Come, you won't miss it. Write what I want you. It's as well to settle it all off now in a friendly way. You see that you can't help yourself. You won't tire us out, for we can wait years for it, and it's worth waiting for. So, come: make up your mind to the dose and take it. You've shown splendid pluck, and now you might give in. I won't bother you now. I'm going to use my influence with the doctor, and you shall have generous diet. You're not going to faint again?"

"No, I'm better now."

"And you'll think it over?"

"Yes."

"That's right. Come along down, doctor. You and I must have a chat about my poor brother. Come along, Goliath the indignant," he added, good-humouredly. "Come and help coax the doctor to give our patient generous food."

He led the way to the door, and Pannell, who was last, turned to give Range a friendly nod, receiving a grateful look in return; and as the door closed the prisoner said to himself—

"What a fine, honest man Jack Pannell would have made!"

He lay listening till the footsteps were gone, and was about then to rise and secure the file, his heart beating with his eagerness, but a feeling of suspicion came over him. Suppose one of the party were behind that panel ready to watch him. The file was too valuable to be risked.

He lay thinking for a few minutes, and then, smiling to himself, he rose from the bed and went across the room, and, holding on by one of the bars, he began to tap the window in a peculiar way.

"Mewburn is watching me," he said to himself as he heard the faintest of creaks behind him, and felt sure that it was the panel being opened softly.

He did not move from his position, but continued the tapping, making it take the measure of a tune, which he began to whistle softly till he again heard the faint creak that told of the panel being closed. It was not until half an hour had passed that he ventured to bend down and secure his treasure in his breast, so deftly that a watcher would not have detected the movement.

Hardly had he done so when Pannell appeared with Jane, bearing a good meal upon a tray, which was left, the great fellow giving him a quiet nod as he backed out after the girl.

"Now then for strength and vigour," said Range to himself. "I ought to wait and recoup myself for a few days; but no! they will be at me again to-morrow, and by then, with ordinary luck, I shall

be in safety. Now for a rope to get down as soon as the bar is cut through; and then it will go hard if I do not cross that wall.

"But the dogs?"

CHAPTER LXV.

LADY FANSHAW'S PRAYER.

LADY FANSHAW did not seem to have recovered from her attack, which, Doctor Murray said, was a form of brain disease due to spinal weakness, for she was low and *distracte*, keeping to her room a great deal; and it was settled that, as soon as she was a little stronger, a migration should take place, and that the party from Elmtree should visit Hyères for a few months, so that the treacherous spring months might be avoided, and that she might be brought back quite strong for the summer.

"No opposition!" cried Sir Harry, playfully. "I shall play the tyrant here. It will quite set you up, and I must have you well. George, too, looks haggard and worn; it will do him good—clear away the remains of that nasty fever he has hanging about him."

Sir Robert was present when these words were said, and he left the room quietly, and went down the shrubbery to swear.

"Poor Harry," he said, after he had delivered himself of some very bad language, of a type more resembling that used by a drill-sergeant than a general, though history says strange things—unwritten history—about some of our great leaders in the art of war.

"I don't know what to do with him. Let the enemy exhaust himself," said Sir Robert. "Alice hates the sight of him, and some day she'll complain to Harry, and the fellow will go off with a flea in his ear."

"Yes, that must be it. I can't say a word to Harry. I am his brother and a visitor. I could speak as his brother, but if I did he would never forgive me. Yes, he would, dear old boy; but it would half kill him. I could speak as a visitor, but—ah, there! it will bring on my gout if I get worrying about all this. The matter must settle itself. Why the deuce did not Range stop and make sure of my Judy! Oh, hang it! everything's in a horrible tangle. I must go and have my pipe."

Alice Fanshaw was too feeble to make much opposition; in fact, she was so weak that she passed most of her time upon the couch, read to by either Sir Harry or Judith, so it was settled that all were to go. Luggage was packed and every other preparation made, while, contrary to Sir Robert's hope, Carleigh expressed himself willing to accompany the party.

"It's a sort of defiance," Sir Robert said; "but never mind; give them time enough, and the troubles settle themselves, eh, Judy?"

"What did you say, uncle?"

"I say about the notion of this going abroad. I'm comfortable enough where I am, but I suppose we must go."

"Yes, uncle, of course. It will do Alice so much good."

"And George Carleigh too, I suppose?"

Judith started slightly, and Sir Robert noticed it, but he only said to himself again—

"Troubles settle themselves, and I shouldn't wonder if Range comes back and marries Judy after all."

"I've ordered the carriage for ten to-morrow morning, Bob," said Sir Harry, at dinner that night. "That will give us ample time to get to town easily, where we can have a good rest and take the tidal train next day. I did hope that Alice would have been down to-night, but she stopped in her room to write a few letters before starting, and begged so hard to have her dinner sent up that I had to give way."

Josephs was holding a plate and Sir Harry carving, when there was a quick rap at the door, and Sir Harry let fall the carvers as Milly rushed in excitedly.

"Oh, Sir Harry! My lady!" she cried.

Sir Harry rushed to the door, overturning his chair as he rose, and Judith followed him, to run with him upstairs, the girl's broken words telling how her ladyship had been seized again just as she was before.

It was an exact repetition of the former attack. Lady Fanshaw had been writing a few letters of farewell to friends, and she had fallen from her chair upon the carpet.

Once more there was the hurrying for assistance, Carleigh galloping off, to return with the doctor.

"Quite out of the question, Sir Harry," said the latter, after a long attendance upon the patient. "She will not be fit to leave home for a month, if she is then."

"And I had reckoned so upon the South of France completely restoring her."

"Well, we must hope it will by-and-by," said the doctor. "She is in so weak a state that you see any excitement brings on the attack. The anxieties of preparation upset her, and then possibly the position of leaning over her writing-table caused a determination of blood to the brain sufficient to bring on another fit. I grieve to say, Sir Harry, that this is more serious than the last."

"Murray, you unman me!" cried Sir Harry, piteously.

"We must hope for the best; but it is my duty to tell you that a third attack may be fatal."

"For Heaven's sake, don't say that!" gasped the unhappy husband.

"Forewarned, my dear sir, forearmed. You know now what to expect, and you know what to do."

"What to do?" faltered Sir Harry.

"Yes; she must have absolutely no anxiety or trouble."

"But more advice?"

"By all means, if you wish it. Have the best men in our profession; but I may tell you that the cure is simple enough, and that we can do nothing."

"Do nothing, man?"

"Absolutely nothing. Give Lady Fanshaw a contented, happy life, and she may live to eighty. If she has incessant care and trouble she will die in one of these fits—or lose her reason," the doctor added to himself.

He stayed that night and went away next morning, with his patient excessively weak, but decidedly better; and as he rode back to Brackley he could not help thinking how great a similarity there was between these attacks—due to a form of spinal and cerebral disturbance—and certain cases he had met with when studying many years before in France, where two people had been suffering from a form of slow poisoning, the noxious drug having been administered from time to time in very small doses, the result being the setting up of an irritation of spinal marrow and brain that produced fits.

"Poor woman! she has been fading away these last six months," the doctor said to himself. "There are secrets connected with these cases that we cannot probe. A prior attachment, perhaps. Oh, these unions of May and December are grievous mistakes!"

Just at this time Sir Harry was sitting by his wife's couch, looking down at her thin, worn face as she slept, asking himself whether he was to blame for this malady. Surely and certainly, the woman he idolised was fading away before his eyes, and as he watched her it seemed to him that perhaps after all he had made a great mistake.

"She should have married a younger man," he thought; "one whose tastes would have been the same as her own. I did wrong in binding her to my frosted, worn-out life. But I loved her. Oh, God! you know how I loved her—my wife—my own!"

He sank down upon his knees by her couch, praying that she might be spared; but with his prayers ever there was mingled the terrible idea that perhaps her love for him had been only a form of duty and that he had wrecked her life.

"And I would give mine now that she might live," he moaned, as he bent down and reverently kissed her brow.

The touch, light as it was, roused her with a start, and her eyes were very wild; but as she realised who it was she raised her thin arms to clasp his neck, and drew the handsome grey head down upon her bosom as a look of peace came over her face.

"My darling," he whispered, and he held her tightly, as if fearing that she might be snatched away; "my darling, you are better now."

"Harry, dear husband," she said almost in a whisper, "if I should die——"

"Alice! Wife!" he groaned.

"If I should die, believe this of me," she continued, softly, "that I have been your true, faithful wife——"

"Oh, Alice!" he whispered, reproachfully.

"And that I died loving you with all my heart."

CHAPTER LXVI.

MILLY MAKES A CONFIDENCE.

THE day before the intended departure Milly met her lover in the fir-wood.

"Yes, my dear, I'm a great deal better and getting stronger every day," said Sam Burton. "You can see that, can't you?"

"Why, of course, Sam," said Milly, as they stood together under the fir-trees, against one of which the keeper's gun was leaning, for he had resumed his work for some time past.

"You think I look better, then?" he said, as he held her in the protective manner against danger adopted by lovers.

"Better? You're nearly yourself again, only different."

"How do you mean different?"

"Why, you look bigger and stronger, and more manly, and you seem more masterful," said Milly, archly; "and I'm quite afraid of you."

"Thou'rt——"

"Ah!" cried Milly, holding up a finger.

"Well, you are not," he said, laughing.

"I am, and I should run away; only you look so smiling and happy when I'm with you that I don't like."

"But I shan't look smiling and happy when you're gone across the seas, Milly. Eh! but it maks me half mad to think how dooll the pläace will be."

"Ah! but it's only for a little while, and it won't be doole when I come back," she added, laughing.

"What do you say doole for?" said Burton. "Why don't you say dooll, lass?"

Milly laughed; but Sam could not see anything to laugh at.

"You might let us be married at once, my lass," he said.

"No, Sam, not yet. Wait a bit. I couldn't leave her ladyship now she's so weak and ill. Sir Harry wouldn't like it."

"But, Milly, my lass, is the captain——?"

"Is the captain what?" said Milly, sharply; for the keeper had hesitated and stopped.

"Is the captain going too?"

"I suppose so," said Milly, tartly. "What difference does that make?"

"I don't like it!" said Burton, fiercely. "Why don't Sir Harry get shoot of him?"

"Sam!"

"I can't help it, my pretty bairn," cried the keeper, pleadingly. "You don't know all, or you wouldn't look at me that how when I say I hate him."

"Then why don't I know all?"

"Because there are things, lass, that I can only tell to my bonny little wife."

"Then you don't trust me?"

"Eh! but I do, my lass."

"And you're still jealous of the captain?"

Burton put his hands together as Milly started from him angrily. She softened directly, and crept to him again, and laid her hands upon his breast.

"Sam," she said, softly, "you great, big, strong, masterful fellow, you've made me love you so that I won't be cross, and I won't tease you; but do try and trust me, dear."

"I will, my bairn—I do," he pleaded.

"Just as if you need think anything about the captain. If you only knew how I hated him!"

"Say that again, Milly, my bairn."

"How I hated him!" she said, nestling to him, "you wouldn't even have the shadow of a fear."

"Then I won't," he said. "It's all because I love you so dear."

"Then now I'll tell you something, Sam," continued the girl, beginning excitedly to untie and retie his neckerchief as she spoke.

"You don't trust me, but I'll trust you."

"I'd trust you with my life, my bairn," he said, tenderly; "but when a man has secrets that belong to other folk he feels as if his tongue's tied. They're things I can only think of and tell myself."

"Oh, Sam, are they so dreadful?"

"Horrid, my bairn!"

"Sam," she cried, shrinking from him, "you've been and shot a poacher!"

"I did once, my bairn; but it was only in the leg, and he's quite well again."

"Then you'll never tell me this horrid secret?"

"No," he said, drily; "but when I've changed you into my wife, and you're bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, then I'm telling myself, bairn, and it'll be all right, and you'll be the first to say I did right."

Milly nodded, and went on tying and untying the kerchief—one of her presents, by the way.

"Well, Sam, I'm going to tell you a secret, to show you why you needn't be afraid of the captain noticing me."

He drew her closer to him.

"Don't you know how you used to talk to me months ago about the captain being always with her ladyship?"

"And you used to fly out at me, bairn."

"Yes, Sam. It used to make me very cross with you for being so suspicious."

"Terribly cross, my lass; you scared me."

"Don't be silly, Sam. Well," she whispered, "I wouldn't say it to any one else but you, Sam. You were quite right."

"Yes, my bairn, I'm afraid I was."

"Not but what she's as good as gold, Sam, or I wouldn't stop and wait on her; but he keeps on worriting her, and she won't tell Sir Harry, because he thinks so much of the captain, just as if he was his son."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, do you know, Sam, there'll be a terrible row some day when Sir Harry finds it out, for the captain goes on writing to my lady."

"Does he, bairn? A scoundrel!"

"Yes; I've seen him twice over go to her room."

"Go to her room?"

"Yes, to her 'boodor,' and put letters in the writing-case."

"How did you see him?"

"I saw him in the glass as plain as could be. I was in the next room each time, and—I heard some one go in and wondered whether it was her ladyship, and I peeped through the key-hole, and could see into the glass all as plain as could be. He put a letter into the case of paper and envelopes, and then went away."

"When did you see him do it last?"

"Only yesterday," said Milly.

"Well," said the keeper, solemnly, "you must not say a word, my lass."

"No, Sam."

"I don't believe her ladyship's a bad 'un."

"I'm sure she isn't, Sam."

"But he's a down bad 'un, and, when Sir Harry finds him out, may the Lord hev mercy on his sinful soul. Amen."

"Then you won't fidget about my being away, dear?" said Milly, after a pause, during which one or two sounds were heard in the pine-wood, like birds chirruping, only it was nothing of the kind, and it made Milly's cheek very red and Sam Burton's pale face look a little more like it was of old.

"No, my bairn; I'm going to wait patient like till thou——"

"What, Sam?"

"You coom back, my bairn, and then——"

"Oh, Sam, what a broad Yorkshireman you are! I shall never make you speak better."

"I am, my lass; but thou don't want to get shoot o' me any the more for that."

"No," she said, laughing.

"For my heart's broad, too, my bairn, and as long as it's true thou wean't mind my speaking like a countryman sometimes."

Sam Burton felt very happy when Milly had gone, and then his thoughts turned upon their conversation.

"He's a down bad 'un," he said to himself—"a reg'lar tempting scoundrel as I wish would shoot lissen by accident with his chilled shot. I feel sometimes as if I ought to speak—but no. What's the poor old gentleman done to me that I should half kill him, and what has her ladyship done for me but good?"

"Nay, Sam, thou'rt English, and it wouldn't be English to go and trample on a woman because a man has hit thee a coward blow. Such a sweet-spoken lady, with a voice like the chink o' silver, or the ring of a bird in spring. Nay, thou'rt safe enew, for I'll not say owt, and nothing would tear it out o' me. But eh, how I'd like half-an-hour along o' the captain, somewheer down i' the wood, and with both our goons at home!"

CHAPTER LXVII.

NEARLY FREE.

REFRESHED by his meal, and with his heart full of hope, Range was ready to attack one of the bars of his window at once; but he could not, for John Pannell was busy in the garden, in full view of where he must work.

He examined the bar, though, and came to the conclusion that he would cut it through at the top, which would enable him easily to bend it down.

The next hour he had determined that it would be better at the bottom, and he longed to begin.

It was impossible; so he devoted himself to the manufacture of a rope, tearing up the bottom sheet of his bed and knotting the strips together.

It seemed very slight when it was done; but he dared not take the other, for fear of its absence being noted. He decided, though, that he could tear off the straps at the last moment, and they would join together, twist with the linen cord, and give the necessary strength.

When Pannell's back was turned Range strained his eyes round to get a glimpse of the further wall, for he knew that he would not be able to get the ladder. It was certain to be secured.

That wall away to the right would be the one. There was the great cedar-tree with one arm going right over and coming on the other side close up to the house. That would be the place. A cedar-tree would be easy to climb, and he could get along the horizontal limb to the wall and drop.

Pannell went in at last, and, determined to risk all in his impatience, instead of waiting till night, Range took the file from his breast and crept to the window, when, to his great joy, he caught sight of the blue smock of his friend the butcher, who was walking through the brickfield and staring up at the house, smoking a short pipe the while.

Range held up the file and then waved his hand, when the man snatched off a greasy cap, gave it a wave in the air, put it on, and walked quickly away.

"He understands me, and he'll be there to-night," thought Range. "I must not wait."

There was an opportunity now for beginning, when, to his dismay,

he saw Mewburn and Sheldrake come into sight from below and begin to pace up and down, talking together earnestly.

This was kept up for an hour, and then Sarah Pannell came out to walk up and down before his window, at which he could see she looked earnestly from time to time.

He kept back out of sight, waiting with impatience, and terribly nervous now lest he should be taken ill or have another fainting fit at so crucial a time.

It was drawing on fast now towards evening, and he felt that he might be very long filing through the bar, however hard he might work when the time came.

A few days back he would not have been interrupted for many hours together, but it seemed as if that unlucky fit had interested everybody in his welfare, for now that the garden was clear, first Sheldrake came up to ask how he was ; ten minutes later it was Pannell ; and when at last he felt that he was free, he heard a low sigh, and, turning quickly, there was the face of Sarah Pannell gazing sadly in upon him ; but the opening was closed instantly, and she disappeared.

At last all seemed safe, and with beating heart he listened previous to making his first attempt, when the far door unclosed, and he darted back and threw himself upon a seat in despair.

The door opened and Pannell led the way, with a good-tempered, self-satisfied air, as he held it back for Jane to bear in another tray with a very fair dinner.

Range had forgotten the possibility of this coming, and he frowned with vexation.

"Strength for my task," he said to himself, directly after ; and, in obedience to Pannell's invitation, he sat down and partook of the meal.

It was quite dark before he dared make an attempt, and then he threw open the window and listened.

All was silent without except when the soft wind came with a puff, and rustled the ivy-leaves.

There seemed to be no sign of any one over the wall towards the brickfield ; but it was, perhaps, too soon, and he had plenty to do before he required help.

Seizing the bar with one hand, the file with the other, he paused for a moment and then began.

Grate ! grort ! grort ! How loud it sounded, and how metallic and musical the bar seemed ! But, noise or no noise, he felt that it must be done, and he filed away, soon making a little cut in the stout bar, in which the edge of the file fitted and stayed.

The noise was very loud, and moment after moment he expected that he would be heard, and left off. To make matters worse, when he ventured to begin again the noise grew more sonorous, and the bar vibrated terribly, giving out a deeper, more musical, tone.

Still, in a kind of desperation, he kept on, with the perspiration streaming from every pore, for he knew that in a couple of hours Sheldrake would be in the next room, and to continue impossible.

He had never before understood how strong an iron bar could be, and how small the impression made by the file after the first quarter-of-an-hour's cutting ; for, judging by the feel of the metal, he would be seven or eight hours hard at work to get through, and Sheldrake would be in his room in less than two.

Plainly enough, he would not escape that night.

He toiled on again, with the file growing more blunt, and then, weak and weary, sat down with his face against the bars.

Piou! came from the fields—a low, soft whistle, which he answered, and, nerved by this, jumped up and filed away again with all his might.

How soon he grew weary now and stopped ! His arms ached and felt heavy, paining him so that he sat down again ; and just as he dropped into his chair one of the laurels opposite his window suddenly became visible, and a long path of light stretched across the lawn.

“Hear it now ?” said Sheldrake.

“No,” replied a voice that Range recognised as Sarah Pannell's. “No ; it is still now. When I was in my room I could hear it quite plainly.”

“I tell you what it is,” said Pannell ; “they're shunting over yonder by the station, and it was the screwing down of the brake you heard.”

“Oh, yes ! that's what it must have been,” said the woman, and the door closed, and all was dark and silent once more.

Piou! came from the field again, but Range dared file no more. He felt that he must be satisfied with the progress he had made, and attempt no more that night ; while, to endorse his determination, he soon after heard steps in the next room.

Under the circumstances, he uttered a low whistle from the window, said plainly, “Not to-night,” and closed it down.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

JUDITH'S PLANS.

“LETTER,” said Sir Robert, “in Mr. Range's room ? Well, take it to Sir Harry.”

“Sir Harry said, Sir Robert, that perhaps you would be kind enough to see to any little bit of business for him while her ladyship is so ill.”

“Certainly, of course. Well, what is it ?”

“The maid found this letter when moving the blotter, sir, in the room Mr. Range had when he was here,” said the butler.

“Oh, well, give it to me, I'll send it to him.”

The butler left the room, and Sir Robert stood holding the unfolded letter in his hand.

“Where am I to send it, Judy, my dear ? New York, Colorado ?

Where's he likely to be? Good heavens, my dear, don't look like that!"

"Do I—am I, uncle?" faltered Judith.

"You turned white as a grenadier's belt, my dear. Why, Judy, you're never thinking of that fellow still?"

She went to his side, put her arms round his neck, and hid her face upon his shoulder.

"My pet!" he said tenderly, as he drew her closer to his breast.

"I can't help it, uncle, dear."

"Phew!" whistled Sir Robert. "This is very, very queer, Judy. You mustn't, you know."

"No, uncle, dear, I must not, but—but——"

"Well, my darling, why don't you speak to the old bear, he won't show his teeth?"

"Oh, I know that, uncle, dear, and I will speak. I know you won't think me unmaidenly if I do."

"Think you unmaidenly? What nonsense!"

"Well, uncle, dear," she said, holding to him very tightly, "I've been thinking so much about Mr. Range lately."

"Yes, now it's too late," said the old gentleman ruefully.

"I don't mean like that, uncle," said Judith, colouring. "I mean I'm uneasy about him."

"Well, when I was, at the time he went, you said it was nonsense."

"Did I, uncle?"

"That you did, Judy. And so now you are uneasy about him?"

"Yes, uncle. It seems so strange that he should never have written once, even to Uncle Harry or to you."

"Well, it does seem strange and it doesn't. Young men are very forgetful."

"Mr. Range never was, uncle."

"But you snubbed him so horribly, Judy."

"I said what I thought was right, uncle, dear—then," said Judith; "but even if I did——"

"Snub him?"

"No, don't call it that, uncle. I say, if I did refuse him, he was not the man to slight both of my uncles, who had been so kind to him."

"Well, no, my dear; now you come to put it that way, I don't think he was."

"And he was too much of a gentleman—nature's gentleman—to bear malice against me for refusing him."

"Well, yes, I think he was," said Sir Robert slowly. "What are you thinking then?"

"What I have been thinking for weeks, uncle, dear—that there is something wrong."

"Wrong? Oh, nonsense, my pet! You don't think he has been kidnapped, do you?"

"I don't know what to think, uncle, dear, only now this letter has come it brings up all my thoughts again, and—and—I'm very, very miserable, uncle, and I don't know what to say."

"Well, I don't see that the girl's finding a letter," said Sir Robert, "has anything to do with making you uneasy. Is this his handwriting?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Humph! you know it then? Well, we oughtn't to read it. We might see who it is to."

"Yes, do, uncle. Pray do," cried Judith eagerly. "No, let me look; I'm sure he would not mind my looking."

The old gentleman's eyes twinkled as he handed the letter to Judith, who read aloud the first words—

"Dear Uncle Wash."

Then she turned it over.

"It isn't finished, uncle!" she cried, half hysterically. "There—there is something wrong."

She turned to Sir Robert with such anxiety in her eyes that the old gentleman took her hand and patted it.

"Why, what could be wrong, my dear? He was here and he went away again of his own free will. Don't get a crazy idea like that in your head."

"But this letter, he had not finished it. He was so business-like that he would not have forgotten it and left it there."

"Oh, I don't know, he might."

"Oh, no, uncle, I'm sure he would not. And then his going away was so mysterious and strange——"

"As to that I don't agree with you."

"It was so sudden."

"Not a bit of it for a man who has just been regularly crushed by the woman he loved."

"Oh, Uncle Rob, do you think he loved me very, very much?"

"I should say very, very much, as you call it. Ah, Judy, you gipsy, what a dreadful little coquette you were! Well, it's come home to you to roost, like the curses. There, don't fidget, he's safe enough somewhere."

"I'm afraid not, uncle. He was so rich that it was a temptation to any one to—oh! I can't say it."

"Burke him for the hoarded millions he had in his pocket, eh? and his watch and chain? There, there, Judy, don't be foolish! He'll turn up again some day when he isn't so sore about you."

"Uncle, dear, you do not go with me in this, you do not agree with me, and I tell you I am sure that there is something wrong. It has been growing upon me for months now, till it has become an absolute certainty."

"Well then, what shall we do—set the detectives to work?"

"I don't know, uncle," cried Judith in a sharp, decisive way, "but something must be done."

"Heyday, and by my leave! Hark at the brigadier!" cried Sir Robert, laughing. "How sharp we are!"

"Don't laugh at me, uncle," cried Judith quickly. "This matter is too serious for joking."

"To be sure it is," said the old gentleman with mock seriousness. "Here, I have it!"

Judith turned to him eagerly.

"Advertisement—Agony column—'Judith to Arthur. Come back.'"

"Oh, uncle," cried Judith, as she turned her reproachful eyes upon his face, flushed with suppressed mirth, "how can you make a mockery of such a thing as this? If you knew the agony I am in about Mr. Range I'm sure you would not give me all this extra pain."

"My dear little girl," said the old gentleman seriously, "I only laughed because you seemed to me to be making too much of it. There, I'll help you. We'll get a detective down from town, if you like, to make inquiries."

"No, uncle, not yet," said Judith, kissing him. "Thank you, though. It is indeed more serious than you think for."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Sir Robert, "for everything here seems to be turning serious. How is Alice this morning?"

"Terribly weak and ill," replied Judith. "Oh, uncle, I'm so reluctant to do anything about this, for fear of wounding dear Uncle Harry, but I cannot rest. I'm sure there is something wrong."

"Very well then, I'll grant it, my dear. What shall we do?"

"We must think, uncle. Let's try first ourselves," she continued with animation and with a firm compression of her pretty little mouth.

"But your uncle! In his state of mind it would trouble him horribly."

"You are pretty well master here," said Judith. "Let us see what we can do about the matter without consulting anybody."

"Good, my dear. Go on, little brigadier; I'll be *aide-de-camp*."

Judith's eyes flashed with eagerness.

"I don't know what has moved me so in this," she cried.

"Heart," said Sir Robert laconically.

"Don't tease me, uncle dear. I say I don't know what has moved me so in this, but I feel convinced that there is something I must find out."

"Good. What first, brigadier?"

"You are teasing me, uncle."

"My little pet, I am thoroughly in earnest. Here I am *aide-de-camp*, and here's my cheque-book. Say the word, and you shall have funds for the war; but I think we had better keep our investigations to ourselves."

"Yes, yes, uncle; and oh how glad I am that we are not going away just yet."

"Well, if you come to that, my dear, so am I, for I am doubtful of the trip doing Alice any good. Between ourselves, Judy, as a great secret, I don't think she will be any better till a certain gentleman has joined some regiment and gone away on active service."

Judith turned scarlet.

"Don't talk like that, uncle, please," she said quickly. "Now about this letter?"

"Well, my dear, under the circumstances we ought to read it."

"I don't think Mr. Range would be angry if I did," said Judith excitedly, "so I will read it."

She read on, beginning aloud. Then she stopped short and read in silence.

"Come, brigadier, that isn't fair," said Sir Robert, and Judith passed him the letter with a vivid blush.

"Oh!" said the old gentleman smiling, "confirmation of what I said. You see, Judy, how fond he was of you for him to write to his uncle in this strain."

"Yes, uncle, dear, I know he was fond of me."

"Is fond of you," said Sir Robert. "Well, this letter doesn't help us a bit."

"We can send it to the gentleman for whom it was meant, and ask him casually of his nephew's health."

"Very well then, a good plan. Write, my dear, at once; we shall hear back in about three weeks."

"Three weeks! Oh, uncle, hadn't we better telegraph?"

"No, certainly not," said Sir Robert firmly. "The letter will do, write then at once."

"No, uncle," said Judith, "the letter must be from you."

"And you know how I hate writing letters, Judy. Well then, here goes!"

He sat down and wrote at Judith's dictation, inclosing the unfinished letter, and stating how it came into the writer's hands.

This done, and the letter placed by Judith herself in the letter-bag, she turned to her uncle, who was putting away his glasses with a sigh of relief.

"May I have a pipe now, my dear?"

"No, uncle, not now, you are coming out with me. Smoke a cigar."

"I hate cigars, my dear."

"You must love one this time."

"Where are we going?"

"To see Burton," said Judith; "he's the most likely man to know what goes on outside the house."

"By George, Judy, what a strategist you would make! There, give me a cigar, and let's hunt out Sam. Only he chatters; don't set the man chattering."

"Sam Burton will do anything I ask him," said Judith decisively.

"Well, we shall see," said Sir Robert, "but be careful, Judy; don't let's do anything that will cause Uncle Harry uneasiness, or that will worry Alice now she's so weak. I say!"

"What, uncle?" cried Judith, anxiously.

"You don't think George and young Range could have quarrelled about you?"

CHAPTER LXIX.

A DESPERATE ATTEMPT.

FOUR days' torture, with the means of escape in his hand that he dared not use, except by fits and starts. There was always some one about, and, though from time to time Range saw his friend the butcher, the bar was not yet cut through.

On the first morning, as soon as it was light, the prisoner carefully swept up the iron-dust and threw some from the window, some beneath the grate, before he thought of passing the rest down a crack of the boards.

The notch was high up, close to the top of the window, and rather in the shade; but every time any one came into the room and approached the bars the prisoner shivered lest it should be seen.

Constant work, though, told; and at last he had the bar so nearly cut through that, even with the file now terribly blunt, Range felt that he could finish in half-an-hour. Further he dare not cut at present.

"Can you keep the dogs indoors to-night, Jane?" said Range that morning as he lay watching the girl as she bustled about, turning every now and then to smile at him, and he noted how tidy and smart she had grown.

"The nasty brutes!" she exclaimed. "I'll lock 'em up in the washhus—howling and barking about!"

That was good; and as soon as he dared venture he asked another question—

"Is your friend the butcher likely to be up to-night, Jane?"

There was a giggle, and Jane turned red.

"Get along, do!" she cried; "just as if I knew. I don't want him to come after me. I've told him so a dozen times."

"But is he likely to come up?"

"Oh, yes! I dare say he is. He goes by here to the evening school. He says he's learning to write a good hand so as to go into business for hisself."

"If he's a good fellow he shall go into business for himself, Jane, and I hope you'll both be very happy."

"Don't, please!" cried Jane, in a troubled voice, "I don't like you to talk like that."

Further conversation was stopped; for the panel opened, and Range saw that there was a woman's face there, which stayed with the tiny door ajar till Jane went away; and when she did go, to Range's trouble and annoyance, he saw that she had tears in her eyes—a fact that he had suspected from hearing her give a peculiar sniff every now and then.

"It's time I was off," he said to himself; "and she shall marry the butcher, and I'll set them up in a good business—that I will.

"They'd say I was mad if they heard me," he said, with a smile; "but that butcher fellow gave about a shilling for this file. I have

put it down to him in my mental account-book as credit for two hundred and fifty pounds."

Just then there was a loud chattering on the window-sill, and he saw his favourite sparrow Judith, attended by a couple more, in their bright spring plumage. Each was hanging down his wings, setting up the feathers of his throat, and showing himself off to the greatest advantage, nodding and bowing and chirping as he hopped about the little hen.

"There's the captain," said Range, gloomily, "and there am I. She'll choose the captain, of course. Ha! ha! ha!"

He laughed; for the captain had approached close to Judith, who gave him a fierce peck in the back. Then the other bird approached her, and he too received a peck.

The captain hopped round, showing himself off, and again was pecked, and at last, after a number of laughable approaches and drivings away, the whole *répertoire* of bird-courting being gone through, the little trio flew off.

An hour later they were back, with the same business going on. Then they were off and away, to first one tree and then another, where there was a tremendous amount of chirping. Later on they would be up on the roof or in the ivy; and, trivial as the matter was, it had a strange fascination for Range, who was eager to see the end.

"The captain's the favourite," he'd say one time. "Yes, of course she'll have him. No, she's driven him away. It's the American. No; he has it worse than the other. She made the feathers fly. Poor little chap! she took them even off his head. Better give up, old fellow. Why, hallo! Now the captain has it. There, what queer creatures women are! Perhaps she'll have neither of them. I almost hope she won't have the captain; for the handsome little wretch looks as if he would beat and ill-use her, and be running after other pretty little hens. I wish the two cocks would have a fair stand-up fight for the little bird; but she seems to do all the fighting."

So the day wore by, much like a score of others. Pannell gardened; the sparrows chirped in the ivy and came after crumbs, and Range tried vainly to coax Judith to come upon his finger; but she would only sit and watch him with her dark eyes, her head first on one side and then on the other.

Range's meals that day were extra good, and he had some wine; but he could enjoy nothing for thinking of the coming night.

Evening at last—a deliciously soft evening, which tempted Sarah Pannell to stay out for long enough, walking; and there were the dogs watching the window, or trotting slowly up and down, looking as if their heads were so heavy that they were a burden and a trouble to them.

Jane had promised to lock them up; but at last when Sarah Pannell had gone in they were still there.

To Range's great delight, though, a few minutes later he heard the girl calling them; and when he went to the window soon after

and made a hissing noise such as at another time set them off barking, they were evidently not there.

He waited till the distant roar of a train could be heard approaching, and then began filing swiftly and softly, then harder and harder as the noise of the train increased, letting the filing die off as the beat of the engine grew more faint; and then waited for another, getting his line from under the mattress, and cutting free the straps, which he also secured together and laid ready for use.

He was in a profuse perspiration and his heart beat violently; but he felt that it was a good thing that his attempt had been delayed, for he was stronger and better prepared for the undertaking.

Another train came by, and he made more progress. Then another pause, and another train, with a fresh attack upon the soft iron.

Another pause, and a fresh train coming thundering along—evidently, by its heavy beat, a goods-train—and, taking advantage of the extra noise, Range filed with all his might; for it seemed as if he would never finish, the file had grown so blunt.

Just as he was faint with exertion and a feeling of despair was upon him, there was a dull jar——

The bar was cut through.

Ten minutes' rest and recovery of breath, during which time he listened attentively; but the dogs were not below. His friend, though, was on the other side of the wall; for here came a soft, low whistle, like that of some night-bird in a swamp——

Piou! piou!

Range answered it softly, and, placing one foot on the window-sill, he drew up the other and stood there, holding on by the cut-through bar, which he seized with both hands and drew towards him.

For a minute he seemed to have no effect upon the stout iron; but, getting one foot against the bar on either side, he drew again with all his might, and the tough metal yielded and bent right down nearly to right angles, the starting of the first well-hammered fibres making the rest comparatively easy.

"Liberty at last!" he exclaimed, as, panting with the exertion, he descended, thrust the file into his breast to act as a weapon in case of need, and then ran to the door.

All was silent, and, feeling that he might as well make the plunge now while a friend was waiting as stay till later, he rapidly secured his rope of twisted linen and straps to one of the other bars, crept cautiously through, and knelt on the outer sill.

To take a good grip of the rope with one hand, the bars with the other, was an easy task, and, lowering himself down, his breast brushed the ivy, and a score of frightened sparrows flew out.

He hesitated for a moment to trust himself entirely to his rope; but a low whistle beyond the wall roused him to action, and, taking care to keep his feet away so as not to kick the window just beneath his own, he slowly lowered himself, the ivy rustling loudly.

He descended very cautiously, for he had two windows to pass, either of which might belong to an occupied room; but to his great

delight the upper room seemed empty, and he went on slowly, touched the sill with his feet, lowering himself down till he sat upon the sill, as soon as the turning rope which made him revolve brought him into a convenient position, where, as he bent forward, he could see that there was a light below in the ground-floor window that he would have to pass.

"Can't help it," he muttered; "it is win or lose now," and he tried to see through the darkness the particular spot where a tree would enable him to mount the wall.

He drew a long breath, and the ivy rustled loudly as he began once more.

"I could drop now if it wasn't for the noise," he muttered; and then his heart seemed to stand still, for there was a sudden fierce rush, the scratching of nailed feet, and the two bull-dogs came baying furiously, to begin leaping up and barking with rage.

To have dropped now would have been to engage in an encounter with the savage beasts, which seemed mad with desire to get at him; and, though Range would not have hesitated to bear a few bites for the price of his liberty, there was something so horrible in the idea of what might follow, that he hesitated, and re-seated himself on the window-sill, holding on with one hand, drawing the file, to hold daggerwise, with the other.

It was maddening, just as he was so near liberty, for the furious barking would bring out his gaolers, he knew.

Just then there was a loud hissing from the wall.

"Down, you beasts! Hiss!" Range could hear, and this created a diversion; for one dog dashed to the wall and began baying, just as a door opened and Sheldrake came out, bearing a table-lamp, and followed by his companions.

"Good dogs, then!" he cried. "Seize 'em, then!"

The dogs bayed more furiously, while Sheldrake held up the light.

"I thought so, boys," he said, softly. "Fifty thou' flying out of the window. Here, Jack, you and Nathan stop below and catch him. Have him in at once. Don't make a row," he whispered; "there's some one on the wall."

Then aloud—

"Come, Arthur, old fellow, don't be foolish. Come down!"

Range made no reply; for he was calculating what his chances would be if he dropped down and fought for his liberty; and a sickening feeling of despair came over him as he knew that his attempt was vain.

"Come, Arthur, old fellow," cried Sheldrake again, loud enough for any one looking on to hear, "how can you play such foolish tricks? He told me he was going to play at meat-roasting," he said to Mewburn.

"Here, come down!" said Pannell, in his gruff, good-humoured way.

"Oh! very well," whispered Sheldrake. "Take the light, Nathan. I'll go up and cut the rope."

Range heard every word; and, as the dogs began baying again,

and Sheldrake handed the lamp to Mewburn and walked in, there was a loud rustling of the ivy once more as the prisoner made a desperate effort to climb back.

"Run and tell him to look out, Sarah!" growled Pannell to the woman, who was now at the door. "He's getting back."

It required a tremendous effort, but Range was light; and as Sheldrake reached the doors and began to unlock them Range was back on his own window-sill, hesitating as to whether he should climb in and take some kind of revenge upon Sheldrake, which might result in his getting out through the door, or still try to escape from where he was.

He drew a long breath, and made up his mind to a risky proceeding; for he was ready to dare all.

Reaching up as high as he could he was able to take hold of the projecting lead-covered cornice that ran round the old house, and, drawing himself up, he kicked out a pane of glass and rested his foot on the wooden bar of the sash.

This enabled him to reach a little higher, and he got a good grip, placed his left foot by his right, and was half up to the roof when he felt a snatch at one foot from the window.

Range worked himself away, spasmodically throwing his feet clear, and Sheldrake's hand glided over his foot; but it was nearly at the expense of a terrible fall, for he felt his fingers slipping over the cornice, and he was almost gone, when his nails stopped in their effort to find a hold against a sheet of lead that overlapped, and as this came away a little he was able to thrust his fingers under and hang motionless for a few seconds.

A shriek came from below, and then a voice Range knew cried—"Oh, Mr. Arthur, sir, don't!"

"Hold on!" cried Pannell, "and I'll come up and help you. Don't move for your life."

Range heard all, with his face gazing up at the stars as he felt that he must fall.

That sensation was but momentary, though, and, driving his fingers further in beneath the lead, he swung himself sidewise, found hold for his feet in the tough ivy branches, made a bit of a struggle, and—how he hardly knew—drew himself over the great cornice, and sank panting in the broad gutter of lead, with the roof rising into a low-tiled ridge a few feet away.

He panted as if he had been running a mile; but there was no rest for him.

About twenty feet away there was a doorway built dormer-fashion in the roof, at the end of a broad patch of leads; and while Range lay panting he heard rusty bolts shot back, and the door creaked on its hinges as it was thrown open.

It was so dark that he could only just distinguish a figure, and, creeping away along the broad gutter, Range got to the end of the house and beyond the ridge as Sheldrake came out and hurried to the cornice over the window.

"Here!" he cried, "give me your hand. I'll pull you up, and —where is he?"

"On the roof!" cried Mewburn. "He has got up on the roof."

"Fool!" exclaimed Sheldrake, furiously, as he walked cautiously along the broad gutter—a fairly safe place, for the cornice formed a parapet nearly two feet high. "Here, Range, no more fooling!" he cried. "There, I can see you. Give in like a man."

"Touch me, you scoundrel, and I'll throw you off the roof!" cried Range, fiercely; for, dark though it was, he felt that he could be seen.

"Two can play at that, you hot-headed idiot!" retorted Sheldrake. "Here, give in. There's no doubt about your madness if you play tricks like this."

"Mad enough now to fight for my liberty," cried Range; "and I warn you that I'm a desperate man."

"So am I," said Sheldrake, in a low, angry whisper; and Range heard a sharp *click, click*. "Give in, or, by all that's holy, I'll fire and bring you down."

"Fire if you dare!" cried Range, defiantly. "Fire, and let the report ring out, and the information go forth that you have shot a supposed madman. I shall then be heard."

"Curse him!" muttered Sheldrake, thrusting his pistol back in his pocket. "Here, where's Jack?" he shouted.

"On the way up," cried Mewburn, from below.

"Hang him! Why don't he come then!" muttered Sheldrake, walking swiftly towards Range, who retreated from him till the two dark shadowy figures had made the whole circuit of the roof.

"Now," cried Sheldrake, fiercely, "are you going to give up sensibly?"

"I'm not going to give up, scoundrel!" replied Range; "but I'm going to knock you backwards if you come too close to me, so take care. I've given you warning. I tell you, I'm a desperate man."

"So am I," muttered Sheldrake again, advancing quickly. "I'm not going to lose you after all this trouble, my fine fellow."

As he advanced, Range retreated, the whole affair being solely the work of a minute or two. They were going round a second time, when ascending steps were heard, following a loud crash, and John Pannell came looming out of the dark way.

"What made you so long?" cried Sheldrake, savagely.

"What made you shut the door for me to have to kick it open?" retorted Pannell, fiercely.

"Don't talk," cried Sheldrake. "Be careful. You go that way; I'll go this. Get him between us close, and then pounce upon him, or he'll be over."

"Right!" growled Pannell, gruffly; and he started in one direction, Sheldrake in the other; but, as they were about to meet, Range made a rush and avoided them, dashing up the ridge of the roof, and sending the tiles flying and crashing as they were dislodged and went sliding down.

This gave him a momentary advantage ; for he was able to reach the other end before his pursuers had time to follow.

But it would be folly, he felt, to attempt this again ; and he knew that he had but one resource—nay, two, for there was the doorway, and for this he at once made, nearly reaching it, when Sheldrake said—

“Run, Jack, run ! The door ! the door !”

Sheldrake might have run, and Pannell run more swiftly, cursing their folly for leaving the door open ; but they could not stop Range from reaching it first, which he did, and started back ; for Mewburn was there ready to slam it in his face.

Then his pursuers closed upon him again, and he eluded them by climbing the ridge and reaching the end of the house farthest from his prison. Here he stopped—at bay.

“Now, Jack, we have him !” cried Sheldrake, as he and his fellow reached the two corners, Range being in the middle. “Steady ! Together ! Now !”

They made a dash forward and brushed Range’s clothes with their hands, as, after a moment’s hesitation, he stepped on to the cornice and leaped right out into the black darkness below.

CHAPTER LXX.

BURTON'S DECISION.

JUDITH turned ghastly pale, and looked at Sir Robert in a scared way as, with a catch in her breath, she said huskily,

“Yes, uncle, I have thought so several times.”

Sir Robert’s countenance was very serious as he looked in the face of the girl whom he loved as if she had been his own child. A thought had flashed across his mind that troubled him more than he would have liked to own.

Had such a meeting taken place somewhere in secret away in the recesses of the woods ? George Carleigh was a soldier, Arthur Range an American accustomed to live away from civilisation, where men used fire-arms and knives on slight provocation. They might have met, an extempore duel have followed a quarrel, and Range might have fallen.

This idea rapidly brought up another.

Had such a meeting really taken place, and was Lady Fanshaw aware of it, and had this had something to do with the state of her health ? The possession of such a secret would have worked the change.

“What are you thinking, uncle ?” said Judith sharply.

He did not answer for a few moments.

“I was thinking,” he said, “thinking very seriously.”

“Yes, uncle dear, pray speak.”

He remained silent again, and Judith saw his face change, and the stern, business-like manner of the old soldier take the place of the easy-going air of the repose-loving country gentleman.

"Uncle, why don't you speak?" cried Judith. "What are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking, my dear," said Sir Robert in a manner such as she had not seen him assume for years, "that perhaps there is something in what you say. Let's go and see Burton, and—no, stop, I'll go myself."

To his surprise, the girl caught him firmly by the wrist.

"Not alone, uncle," she said firmly, "this is my business too."

"But, Judy, my child."

"Uncle dear," she said in the clear voice of a woman moved to the quick, "if there is anything wrong it is my doing, and I shall follow out the search to the very end."

It was not always an easy matter to find Sam Burton when he was wanted, and there was only one hopeful thing about the quest, and that was the fact that he was certain to be somewhere on the estate.

For a good two hours did Sir Robert and Judith track him from the kennel to certain traps, away along by where the Brackley men came over to set snares. Then he was away down by the little river to see that no unlicensed fishers were after the trout, and again up on the high moorland, where a few grouse bred; for since he, Sam Burton, had become convalescent he had been indefatigable—overdoing it, Milly said, but really finding strength in the sweet fresh air and that wholesome fatigue which made his sleep of the deepest and most restful kind, and then it was that nature toiled hard to repair the weak points about his terrible wound.

"There he is at last," cried Sir Robert, as he had seated himself on the very seat where Lady Fanshaw had crouched, listening to the struggle months before, and was wiping his moist forehead. "I believe, Judy, the best way to find people is to sit down till they come by."

In effect there was the keeper coming slowly up the little valley, and he stopped before them at last, touching his hat respectfully, and giving each of them a rather uneasy look.

"Burton," said Judith, taking the initiative, "you are an old and favourite servant of my uncle's."

"I'm glad to hear it, ma'am," said Burton wonderingly.

"And I believe that you would do anything to serve him and Lady Fanshaw."

"Anything, ma'am, anything," said the keeper earnestly.

"And you would try to help me if I wanted help, Burton?"

"Why, miss—ma'am," said Burton, "do you think I could ever forget about how you waited on me when I was lying wondering how soon I should be took away?"

"Don't talk about that, Burton," said Judith, "but listen. I want you to help me, and to keep your own counsel—to keep what I say to you a secret."

"You may trust me, miss, for that."

"Then, to be plain with you," said Judith, glancing first at Sir Robert, as if for his endorsement of her plans, "I want you to help

me in a delicate matter, and I trust to your manliness and honour to be perfectly silent."

"You may trust me, Miss Judith," said Burton again, and he changed colour slightly as an uneasy feeling began to assail him.

"Of course you remember how suddenly Mr. Range went away?"

There was quite a pause before the keeper replied,

"Yes, miss, I remember that."

"I—my uncle—I am very uneasy about it. We have heard nothing about him since. Can you account for it?"

Sam Burton's countenance changed no more, but remained of the unhealthy white it had assumed after his severe illness, as he drew a long breath and said calmly,

"No, miss, I can't account for it."

"You don't think he was seized, or trapped, or waylaid in the woods, do you, by any one who would rob him? You know he was very rich."

"Yes, miss, very rich and very generous," said Burton hoarsely.

"And you think he might have been waylaid as I said?"

"No, miss, I don't," said Burton firmly.

"Do you know anything about his disappearing?"

Burton paused again to steady his voice before saying, "No, miss, I don't know anything."

"We—I want to trace him, Burton, to find out whether he left here, or whether——"

Judith could not finish. Her voice had been very firm and eager up to this point; now it trembled, and she became silent, standing with her hands clasped and her piteous eyes fixed upon the keeper, as if he held her destiny and she were awaiting his sentence.

To a certain extent he did hold it, or thought he did; and as he stood there, in a rapid judgment, he asked himself again what it was his duty to do, holding up the scales before his mental vision, and carefully balancing each side.

On the one hand there was respect for genial, kindly Sir Robert, who all through his illness had come and chatted by his bedside about game and poachers and wild things and his own adventures in the East, giving him too, almost in opposition to Dr. Murray's orders, many a surreptitious pipe or cigar. There too was Miss Judith, for whom he felt a kind of love and reverence as he recalled the soft touch of her little hand upon his brow in times of fever, and the gentle, womanly ways that had, in conjunction with Lady Fanshaw's, soothed his agony many a time and oft, hers being the more welcome, since, in spite of the kindness, his mistress's presence brought with it a feeling of trouble that wearied him and kept him back.

Yes, he would do almost anything for Miss Judith; he would have fought for her as long as he could have raised his hand. He was ready to do anything for her good.

On the other hand there were his love and duty towards his master, whom he had served from a boy, and for whom and his parents his own father had worked. If he told all he knew what did it mean? Discovery of a horror, despair and madness for his master, shame

and misery for Lady Fanshaw; and for Captain Carleigh who could say how it would end? probably in death by his own hand. Lastly, there was the sweet, gentle girl before him who looked so pleadingly in his eyes—what about her? Would it not be better that she should remain in ignorance of her lover's fate than for him, Sam Burton, to speak out and those ghastly remains to be dragged forth into the light of day?

Sam Burton's judgment was on his master's side, as, thinking to himself, "There are times when a man must tell a lie, and this is one——"

"No, miss," he said, firmly; "I don't know anything about him! Last time I see Mr. Range, he was going into the fir-wood, out by the swing-gate."

"Yes; but when?" cried Sir Robert.

"The last night, Sir Robert, as he weer here."

"One hope of a clue gone, uncle," said Judith, quietly, as they walked back; "but another one will offer itself, I feel sure."

"The confounded scoundrell!" said Sir Robert, to himself. "There's gratitude! I'll tackle him by myself. I haven't studied soldiers' faces thirty years for nothing. The fellow was telling her a lie, I'll swear!"

CHAPTER LXXI.

UNCLE WASH.

LADY FANSHAW was still very weak and ill—so weak that all thought of a trip abroad was given up. Sir Harry had whispered to her about their first journey together on the Continent, and told her if she could summon up strength he felt sure that it would help her recovery; but she shook her head, asking simply to be allowed to rest; and she kept her room, merely going to the boudoir for a few hours each day.

There was a truce between her and Carleigh, whom she never met. While one day he would be making up his mind to pack up and go, the next he would give up the idea with a shudder of dread, and tell himself that he must stay and watch for the sake of his own safety; watch for any fresh disposition towards confession on Lady Fanshaw's part; watch lest his enemy, Burton—between whom and himself there was also an armed truce—should be ready to break their silent compact. Above all, watch the growth of the evergreens and creepers about the mossy earth and rock down in the winding dell.

For there was a fascination in that place which he could not resist, and hour after hour he and his observer, the little robin, were there.

If a naturalist had told him that the bird was waiting till he turned up some fresh earth so that it might obtain food, Carleigh would have laughed him to scorn; for in his morbid state he felt that some strange influence was at work, and the round, watchful eye of that bird made him shudder as he sat and smoked, on seat or stool, waiting for he knew not what, but determined upon one thing—that he would not be betrayed.

Sir Robert and Judith were together discussing the advisability of calling in professional assistance, even at the risk of exciting scandal; and Sir Robert had just said, "No, my dear, not yet. Let's wait and see whether we get an answer to my letter. It must be ten days yet," when Josephs entered the library.

"Gentleman to see Sir Harry, Sir Robert. I told him Sir Harry did not receive visitors, but that perhaps you would see him."

"Where is his card?"

"He had no card, Sir Robert. He said his name was Range."

Judith started to her feet.

"Not Mr. Arthur Range?" cried Sir Robert.

"Oh dear, no! Sir Robert," said the butler. "This is a tall, elderly person, Sir Robert—American."

"His uncle!" said Judith to herself, as her breath came fast.

"Show him in!" exclaimed Sir Robert; and he had just forced Judith into a chair and bidden her be calm when a tall, thin, yellow, dried-up looking man—whose clothes hung loosely all over him, and whose soft felt hat was on his head and his hands in his pocket—was shown in.

"Day to yew both," he said, slowly taking his right hand from his pocket and doffing his soft hat, to show how short his grizzly hair had been cut all over his head, and how long and wide his ears had grown.

He was not shabbily dressed; but he looked as if he had not five pounds in the world, as he stood there swinging his hat in his enormous bony hand.

"Good-day," said Sir Robert, as Judith rose. "Be seated."

"So Sir Harry Fanshaw's down, is he? Hope not mighty bad, sir?"

"Not seriously ill," said Sir Robert. "Mr. Range, I think."

"Washington—more commonly called Wash Range or Copperhill Range, sir."

"Uncle Wash!" exclaimed Judith, involuntarily.

"That's me, my dear," said the old fellow, turning to her with a pleasant smile.

"We are very glad to see you, sir," said Judith. "How is your nephew—Mr. Arthur Range?"

"That's just what I've come to find out," said the visitor. "My boy came over here just to see the little old island and the other places, and he said he shouldn't write much; but when we parted I said to him, I said, 'Ef you don't get back, Arthur, in a year from now, I shall come and look after you.' He didn't come back; and I've come."

"Then you didn't get my uncle's letter—posted ten days ago?" said Judith, eagerly.

"Not me, my dear. Ten days ago I was at New York, getting aboard the steamboat. I say, stop a moment!"

He made a motion with one big hand, dropped his broad soft hat upon the carpet, unbuttoned his coat from top to bottom; then, giving his chest a flap with his broad hand, he said quietly—

"Go on, my dear. I feel a bit lighter now. Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Oh, no! I hope not," said Sir Robert. "He left here very suddenly—that's all. We found an unfinished letter of his ten days ago. It was for you, and I sent it."

"Left an unfinished letter? Went away suddenly? Hasn't he written to you?"

"No; we have not heard a word."

"But suddenly, you said. Anything wrong—a quarrel?"

Sir Robert glanced at Judith, who coloured painfully, and then turned pale, as she saw the old American's keen eyes fixed searchingly upon her as if bidding her speak.

It required a struggle; but she mastered the weakness and looked up in an ingenuous manner in the old man's face.

"There was no quarrel," she said; and her sweet, silvery voice sounded very clearly. "We had been very happy here; for I knew your nephew when he came out to Malapport."

"To be sure," said the old American; "he talked to me about you when he came back."

"We had renewed our friendly intimacy, till one day—when——"

Judith hesitated for a moment, and then gave her little foot a tiny stamp upon the floor as she mastered her weakness and timidity and spoke out—

"One day Mr. Range made me an offer of marriage."

"Yes?"

"And I refused him."

"Did you know what a rich man he was, my dear?"

"Oh, yes! of course."

"You found him too common and rough—like me, eh?"

"I found Mr. Range a very kindly, true-hearted gentleman," said Judith, warmly.

The old man dropped the hat he had picked up once again, rose in a slow, lumbering way, and crossed to Judith to take one of her little white hands, hold it between his great rough, bony paws for a few moments as if admiring it, and then raise it to his lips and kiss it.

"Thankye, my dear," he said quickly. "He is as good a lad as ever stepped—and as true."

"Well," he continued, as he resumed his seat; "you refused him. May I ask why? knowing what a rich man he was—richer a deal, I bet, than a many of your aristocracy."

"That was one reason," said Judith, calmly, "especially as I was only a poor, dowerless girl."

"No, no, no!" said the visitor, slowly, as he shook his head. "A million o' dollars wouldn't make you a bit better."

"Right, Mr. Range! Quite right!" cried Sir Robert, warmly.

"Thankye," said the old man, dryly. "Somethin' else, perhaps, my dear. Inquisitive of me; but all this is important. Some other one, perhaps. Beg pardon, but another chap, p'r'aps. Liked him better?"

Judith's face was flaming, but she spoke out firmly.

"Uncle—Mr. Range—there is some terrible mystery here, and it is my excuse for speaking so plainly. Mr. Range, I refused your nephew when he asked my hand——"

"Yes, my dear—go on."

"Because I was a very foolish girl."

"That's true," said Uncle Wash, bluntly. "And then he was humped."

"I beg your pardon."

"It upset the lad, and he went away sudden like."

"Yes, either that night or very early the next morning."

"Humph! Poor lad! Thankye, my dear; you've spoken very nicely, and I'm much obliged. You see I've come over to find him. He left here, you say?"

"Yes, we believe so," said Sir Robert, for, unable to contain herself at this verification of her suspicions, Judith was weeping silently, with Uncle Wash watching her furtively from the corners of his eyes.

"Thankye. Well, I don't kinder know yet what to say. Arthur wouldn't go into the woods and blow out his brains."

"My dear sir!"

"I say he wouldn't," said Uncle Wash sharply; "he was too sensible. He didn't go back to London and get on the spree, as some young fellows would, for I've been having a hunt for him there. He didn't go back to his hotel, for his portmanteau was there just as it comes from here months ago. Miss Judith, it's plain speaking before a lady, but I'm a rough, uneducated man, so don't be hard on me when I say I'm beginning to think he never went away from these parts."

CHAPTER LXXII.

ANOTHER HOPE GONE.

RANGE knew the great cedar-tree grew up and spread its broad, frond-like branches where he leaped. He could dimly see them from where he had stood at bay, and, feeling sure that he would succeed in clinging to one of the long bending boughs, after falling from one to the other, he had boldly leaped.

The risk was terrible, he knew, and he knew, too, that he would, if he reached the ground, be attacked by the savage dogs; but he was so strung up now that he was ready to run any risk sooner than be taken, and his idea was that he might cling to one of the boughs after falling some distance, and not reach the ground, but the wall, and escape.

And so he leaped right to where a black broad bough spread itself beneath him.

He fell right into it, and its rough, prickly needle foliage scratched

his hands as he clung to it, and felt the twigs glide through his fingers.

Then *crack! crack! crack! crack!* Branch after branch of the brittle wood snapped, and he fell with a heavy thud upon the ground, half stunned, but to recover directly and wince with an agonising sickening pain in his arm.

"Down, you brutes!" he heard some one say; and then he fainted, to find himself, when he came to, lying in his own bed, with a candle burning on the table, and John Pannell sitting in a chair by the bedside, smoking.

"Awake?" he growled.

"What does—what was—ah! I remember now. You brutes! You cowards!"

"Steady, my boy, steady; take it coolly, or you'll do yourself harm. Make you feverish."

"What's the matter with my arm?"

"Broken. Hurt you much?"

Range tried not to show it, but that burning, stabbing agony forced a low hissing gasp from his lips.

"You shall have it set in the morning. Lie still now and bear it like a man. What a fool you were to jump!"

Range did not reply, but lay with the drops gathering upon his forehead, and a sickening sensation causing the light to look dim where it stood upon the table.

By degrees the pain grew more dull, and Range lay thinking of this abortive effort to escape, angered with himself for not managing better, though how he was to have contrived differently he could not tell.

Pannell smoked steadily on, calmly and contentedly, speaking now and then to the prisoner in a bluff, sympathetic manner that had its effect.

"Have some 'bacco?" he said once; but Range made no reply.

"I say, my lad, how did you come by that file?" asked Pannell, after a pause: but still there was no reply.

"Here, what's the good of being sulky with me, old fellow? I want to make matters easy for you if I can."

"Give me my liberty, then."

"Ah! that belongs to my two companions as well. Can't do that."

"Then don't pester me."

"Can I do anything to make your arm more easy?"

"Fetch a surgeon."

"Shel—I mean Brother Frank—says he is not to be fetched till morning."

"I am to see a surgeon then?"

"Why, of course, man."

"Thank Heaven!" sighed Range; and in spite of the pain he lay thinking of the coming meeting, and of how necessary it would be for him to be calm and patient before his visitor, so as to impress

him favourably, and counteract the declaration of his captors that he was mad.

The pain made the hours seem very long ; but there was the light of hope through the darkness ; and, unless they brought in some bribed creature of their own, escape might be nearer than he hoped for after his last night's failure.

He could not be very angry with Pannell, for the man was thoroughly sympathetic and kind, laying a stiff board beneath his broken arm, and, in spite of a refusal, filling and lighting a pipe for him, which he was fain to smoke with no little sense of relief.

Morning at last—a bright spring morning—with Judith and her lovers upon the window-sill, and even in his suffering Range could not help watching curiously the progress of the sparrow captain's love.

Some breakfast was brought up about six o'clock, and before eight the prisoner's quickened hearing told him of a strange step upon the stairs.

"Now," thought Range, "here is some one who will hear my story and believe my words," and he turned his head eagerly as the door opened, and Sheldrake ushered in a tall grey, gentlemanly man, who was followed by Mewburn, bearing his arm in a sling.

"Hah ! how are we this morning ?" said the new-comer, with a pleasant smile.

"Are you a medical man ?" exclaimed Range, eagerly, starting up in bed, and feeling sick with the pain.

"To be sure I am ; but that's a very foolish thing to do. You see how you hurt yourself."

"Yes," said Range, allowing himself to sink back. "It was foolish, but I am eager to make my case known."

"Your case ? To be sure. You can talk to me while I examine your arm."

Range felt sick, but this time not from the pain, but the manner in which this man took his remarks.

"He thinks I'm mad, of course ; but I'll soon convince him that I am not."

"Hah ! yes," said the surgeon, deftly handling the injured limb that he had laid bare, and giving but little pain by his delicate touch. "A compound fracture. But there, we'll soon get it in splints ; and at your time of life, sir, the bone will easily knit together."

"Give me peace of mind, doctor, and that broken arm is a mere trifle."

"Well, I must leave that to my American *confrère* here, Doctor Parkins. He does not interfere in surgery ; I do not pretend to men—to complaints such as yours."

"Of course they have told you I was mad, sir," said Range, speaking calmly.

"Well—er, no. Oh, dear no ! That you have fits of excitement sometimes. We all do, my dear sir ; but you are getting better fast."

Range remained silent to recover the calmness that was leaving him ; and he lay watching the surgeon as he set the limb, meaning, when he felt that he could, to try and impress him favourably.

"Do I hurt you much?" said the surgeon.

"Well, yes ; a great deal," replied Range, smiling. "It is not an operation I should choose for pleasure."

"No, no! of course not. That's very brave and manly of you. It is a nasty, sickening sensation that bringing the bones again into contact. Some men would groan and cry out terribly and faint."

"What good would that do?" said Range, quietly, as he noted that his gaolers were looking on.

"Ay, to be sure, what good indeed? That's better. Of course you'll lie very still, or, at all events, keep the arm very still. There, I'll be bound to say those broken ends are beginning to think already about pouring out new bone matter for cementing the damaged places, and in a short time they will be so buttressed that the arm will be stronger than ever."

"Now, doctor," said Range, after a little more conversation, "I have been waiting and talking to you that you might see that I was perfectly in possession of my senses."

"To be sure, my dear sir—to be sure."

"So now I ask you, as soon as you leave this place, to go at once and give information to the police that I am detained here by these men so that they may obtain a heavy ransom from me, for I happen to be a very rich man. My name is Arthur Lincoln Range, and if you will write to Sir Robert Fanshaw, Elmhorne, Brackley, he will endorse my words. Now, will you help me?"

"Certainly, my dear sir, with all my heart."

"And you will communicate at once?"

"No," said the surgeon, firmly, "not at once. You have a bad compound fracture of that arm, and I must not have you all in a fret of fever to keep back my work. Have patience and all will come right."

"You mean that you do not believe me, sir."

"Oh, no, no! There, there! now you must lie still and sleep as long as you can. Nature mends bones wonderfully while we sleep."

"Doctor, I swear to you that I am the victim of a conspiracy," said Range, quietly. "Pray! sir, help me! I appeal to you as a man."

"Yes, yes! of course. Now lie still while I get this bandage right."

"These men keep me a prisoner here till they can plunder me. They swear they are my relatives. They are utter strangers to me. For pity's sake help me!"

"My dear sir, I am helping you back to a sound state."

"But can you not see that I am kept a prisoner here? I am a man of enormous wealth. I have millions of dollars, and I will pay you anything to get me free."

"There," said the surgeon; "now we shall do. As to your arm, Dr. Parkins, I should continue what you have been doing, the arnica, and after a time, if there is much pain——"

"A cold compress," said Mewburn.

"Exactly," said the surgeon. "Now, my friend," he continued, turning to Range, "I've done my part; you must do yours."

"No, doctor, you have not done yours!" cried Range, excitedly. "I appeal to you as a man. I beg of you to write to Miss Nesbitt, Elmthorpe, Brackley, and tell her where I am."

"Ah, well, well! we'll see. Now you must go to sleep, or I shall have to give you a strong sedative to calm that brain."

"Sedative to calm that brain!" said Range to himself, as, with despairing eyes, he saw another hope in the person of the surgeon depart, just when he had been expecting so much.

For the door closed upon the retreating figures, leaving him alone with Pannell.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

A STAUNCH DOG ON THE TRAIL.

UNCLE WASH screwed up his face, nearly shut his eyes, and then made a noise with his tongue as if he had just tasted something nice.

"Yes," he said again; "I'm beginning to think my boy didn't leave these parts."

Judith clasped her hands tightly and turned a peculiar look upon Sir Robert.

"Here, stop! What's that mean?" said Uncle Wash.

"Well, Mr. Range, to be frank with you, it means that my niece here has for a long time past been very suspicious about this affair, and—well, to be quite plain with you—so have I."

Judith seemed to be turning giddy, for her face grew very pale; but by a brave effort she mastered the weakness and stood looking from one to the other.

The tall, dry, yellow-looking old American stood gazing very keenly at the last speaker, and his cold, hard, steely eyes had a gleam of suspicion in them such as would show in the glance of a man whose life had been passed among enemies.

But the cold, hard look softened directly, and he rose and held out his hand.

"I'm not like you," he said, addressing Sir Robert. "I'm a rough, plain man; but I've heard a deal about English gentlemen, and you seem to be one. I'm very fond of that boy, just as much as if he was my own flesh and blood. I want you to help me to find him."

"By George, sir!" cried Sir Robert, warmly; "I'll do all I can, and if you want money pray speak."

Uncle Wash grasped the General's hand, giving it a heavy crush with his great fingers as he laughed silently.

"Money, squire," he said, with a nasal drawl broader than he had

used before ; " why, we've got more than we know what to do with. I'm tired of it and never spend any ; but I'm going to spend a few dollars now to find my boy."

Then, turning to Judith, he took her little hand and held it in his left, stroking it softly with his right.

" Say," he said, " I think we're going to be good friends. Yew're going to help me?"

" Yes," cried Judith, eagerly ; " I had already commenced the search."

" I thought we were, my dear. I don't know much about women folk, but you look like the sort of girl a fellow would go mad upon."

" Mr. Range!"

" Yes, my dear, I mean it ; and he'd be quite right to dew it. I wish yew hadn't been quite so hard on my boy."

" Don't let's talk about that, please," cried Judith, blushing ; " but try at once if we can get some clue."

" Clue? You mean trail—signs? To be sure—yes. That's so! First of all, though, will yew make a bargain with me—both on yew?"

" Bargain?" said Sir Robert.

" Yes, sir. Yew see, I'm rather wild and rough and not used to yewre ways ; but I want yew to bear mine for a bit. I'll get took in at some place hard by and come over every morning."

" Nonsense!" said Sir Robert, bluffly. " I am acting for my brother, whom you will see by-and-by. He wouldn't hear of such a thing. Judy, my dear, you'll order a room to be got ready for Mr. Range?"

" Of course, uncle."

" No, no!" said the old fellow, quickly ; " we shall be best friends if I stop outside. Why, do you know, squire," he continued, with a grim smile, " I'm as rough as I was when I first went prospecting fer gold. Think of this now, my dear : I always eat with my knife."

" I've known the time," cried Sir Robert, heartily, " when out campaigning I've had to eat stuff roasted on a ramrod and pulled to pieces with my fingers."

" Yes, but yew're diff'rent now."

" Please stay, Mr. Range," said Judith, laying her hand upon his arm and looking up earnestly in his eyes.

The old man smiled down at her in his grim, dry way.

" I read something once," he said, " 'bout a gal and a lion. The lion had come to eat that gal up ; but when he saw how beautiful and good and innercent she was, that there lion goes down, he does, and follers that there gal about like a dawg. I feel like that there lion—just. I says to myself, ' My boy's got himself into trouble over some gal, and she's a bad 'un, and I'm just going over there to finish her off if money'll do it ; ' but now I've seen you, my dear, and you'll let me, I shall foller you like a dawg. Yew've made Wash Range your humble sarvant, my dear, and what yew tell him to do he'll dew."

"Then stay," said Judith, eagerly, as she listened to the quaintly spoken, but thoroughly respectful speech.

Uncle Wash took her hand and kissed it, and then turned to Sir Robert.

"Yes," said the latter, nodding; "you stop here, Mr. Range, and we'll hunt out this mystery if there is one."

"Thankye," said Uncle Wash. "Then I'll fetch my little bag from that inn by the river-bridge, and we'll begin efter."

"The bag shall be fetched," said Sir Robert, "and we'll begin now."

The old man smiled his satisfaction, and, taking the chair Sir Robert placed for him by the writing-table, as if expecting him to take notes, he changed his manner and began to talk quickly.

"Ef you'll let me go to work my way, I think we shall get on faster," he said.

"One moment," said Sir Robert. "Shall I telegraph to town for a sharp detective?"

"Guess not. This is country, sir, and I think I'll have a look round myself. If I can't do any good, then we'll have the po—liss. Now then, just tell me plain how it was he went."

Judith's hesitation was gone now, and she told him exactly—everything about Range's last day at the Priory.

"Ah!" said the old man, nodding, and pushing the paper and pens away with his broad hand. "Now listen to me, both of you. That boy's all the world to me. I'd give every dollar I have and he has to get him back safe and sound, so yew mustn't mind if I say sharp things and speak ugly about your friends. I'm suspecting everybody just as I used to hev to suspect every Injin or Yankee out yonder in the wild country."

"Go on, Mr. Range; we shall not mind."

"Then look here: first of all, did Sir Harry like my boy?"

"Very much, indeed," said Sir Robert.

"Want him to make it up with miss here?"

"No. He wished her to marry Captain Carleigh."

"Hah! Lady Fanshaw like him?"

"Certainly," said Judith, "always."

"Did Captain Carleigh like him?"

Sir Robert was silent.

"Did the cap'n like my boy?" said Uncle Wash again, this time looking at Judith.

"No: he was very jealous of him."

"Did they quarrel?"

"I'm nearly sure they did."

"Why?"

"Captain Carleigh was so angry with me one day after being with Arthur."

There was a grim smile playing for a moment on Uncle Wash's yellow face.

"I mean with Mr. Arthur Range, in the wood down by the streams."

"Don't alter it, my dear," said the old man, softly. "Go on."

"And Mr. Arthur——"

"*Arthur*," said Uncle Wash, firmly.

"Arthur was a little changed in his manner to me. I saw it directly."

"Yes; yew would," said the old man, emphatically. "Cap'n down on you for talking to my boy?"

"He was very angry with me several times."

"Hah!" said the old man, tapping the table sharply. "Well, it don't do to be sure about anything; for if there's a deceitful thing it's a trail, wherever it is. But this seems mighty clear. Don't fire up, please; I must be plain. Yewre Cap'n Carleigh and my boy have met somewhere about yewre place here; they begun with hard words, and yewre cap'n told my boy that ef he didn't clear out he'd horsewhip him."

"Yes," said Judith, in assent, as she sat with parted lips, gazing eagerly at the old man.

"Clear out's what my boy wouldn't do for the Prince of Wales or the Emperor of Roosher, if he thought what I think about you, my dear. Then from big words they came to blows, and they out with their revolvers."

"Gentlemen don't carry revolvers in England," said Sir Robert.

"Then it was with something else it was done," continued the old man. "Yewre cap'n killed my boy in the fight, and then, being skeart, he hid him, and we've got to find him out."

Judith's face had been growing whiter as this brutally plain speech was made, and her eyes closed and she sank back.

The next moment she had recovered, and was standing erect, trembling violently, but ready to turn to Sir Robert with a look that said as plainly as words—

"There, what did I say?"

"This is a terrible charge, Mr. Range," said Sir Robert, gravely.

"Yes, sir. But I warned you I couldn't spare any one. I've got to find my boy; and I'll find him if it takes all I've got, and my life, to do it."

"I don't like to say anything. I dare not, for fear of falsely accusing any one, but you must go on."

"Yes, I must go on," said the old man, firmly. "Cap'n here?"

"Yes."

"Well, I s'pose I shall meet him. I shall say nothing till I'm sure. It's awkward, but there it is. Of course he'll be 'cute enough to know why I'm here."

"What do you propose doing first?"

"Just quietly looking round," said Uncle Wash. "It's of no use to go and holler, and say, 'Here's a man killed; come and help find him.' Yew'd get a mob round you, and in your way, and they'd trample out all the trail."

"Then you mean to make no stir?"

"I mean, if yew'll let me stay here, squire Sir Robert, to go

quietly about this matter, not saying a word to the police or anybody, except them I have to deal with, till I've found my boy.

"Then——"

"Yes, then?" said Sir Robert, for the old man paused.

"Then, we shall see!"

CHAPTER LXXIV.

A LOSS FOR THE PROFESSION.

"DEAR me! Ah!" said the surgeon, "a very sad case, sir—a very sad case. More painful, I think, than one where the reason is entirely gone."

"Much more."

"Exactly; for, where the reason is quite gone, it's quite gone."

"Exactly."

"And the patient never thinks."

"Of course not."

"And did he saw through that iron bar?" he continued, as they slowly descended the stairs to the dining-room, where a comfortable breakfast was spread.

"Yes; and he must have got through it in one day with a table-knife," said Sheldrake.

"I wonder you let him have table-knives," said the surgeon.

"What is one to do?" said Sheldrake. "But pray sit down. You must breakfast with us. Ah! here is Mrs. John Range, my sister-in-law. Sarah, dear, Mr. Harrington. Poor Arthur is all right now."

"And calm?" said Sarah, after the customary bows.

"Oh, yes! pretty well. But you were saying about table-knives. It is my fault. I pleaded, and Doctor Parkins gave way. We are obliged to keep him shut up; but, excepting that, I want him to feel as little as possible that he is a prisoner."

They took their seats, and the breakfast commenced.

"Well, there is something in that," said the surgeon, who began to enjoy some well-cooked ham.

"I argue that the less he has to remind him of his condition the better."

"Of course! of course! Thanks; yes, coffee, if you please. Just what you said, Mr. Range—the idea about the enormous wealth."

"Yes," said Sheldrake, sadly; "only he generally makes it billions instead of millions."

"And the other matter came up, I noticed, about the lady. I presume that was the lady he named."

"Yes, poor fellow! Sweet girl. She never meant anything, but he was wild after her. It's wonderful to me."

"By no means wonderful," said the surgeon. "Sexuality is the cause of numberless cases of insanity year by year. One often finds people mad through love, but not always combined with the belief as to wealth. Billions, eh?"

"Of dollars," said Sheldrake, quickly—"not pounds. Poor boy,

he has money, you know—a nice little bit; and I believe the time is coming round when he will enjoy it. As Dr. Parkins here will tell you, his fits are not so violent; and where he has one now he used to have ten.”

“You can’t do better than keep on to this course of living here quietly as you do. It is a sacrifice, of course.”

“Oh, we don’t mind that,” said Sarah, with the tears in her eyes, “if we can bring my husband’s brother back to what he was.”

“And he actually leaped from the top of the house into that grand old cedar?”

“Cut through the bar, climbed up the ivy, as I told you, and leaped off. I don’t think he knew that there was a tree there, or anything else. His fit was so bad. We tried to catch him, but it was impossible. He was active as a wild cat. Fortunately the tree was there. Look: you can see the broken branches that saved him.”

Sheldrake rose and held aside the curtain, where four good-sized boughs lay on the grass, snapped off, and beneath the tree.

“A wonderful escape!” said the surgeon, who then rose and left, promising to look in soon again.

“Very nearly a wonderful escape,” said Mewburn, shrugging his shoulders, and unfastening the sling that supported his sham injury—one of the effective little bits of scenery suggested by Sheldrake to help the drama. “You think it’s safe, speaking so plainly about it all?”

“Safe? The plan, Nathan! Why, I believe if our friend did get away the police would bring him back. I say, he looked curiously at you. These fellows are not fond of foreign diplomas; but I set him right by deferring to his opinion.”

“And my declaration that I never interfered with surgery. Ha! ha! ha! That pleases them. They’re as jealous as a jilted woman.”

He glanced at Sarah, and then dropped his eyes; for she gave him so fierce a look that it set him thinking of the unpleasant things he had read about what angry, jealous women would do.

“Don’t you be uneasy, Nathan.”

“But this surgeon will go and talk the matter all over the village.”

“Of course he will.”

“But it will be such an exposure.”

“Rubbish, man! Invisible bolts, locks, and bars about him. Can’t you see that the impression will be favourable to us, and unfavourable for him upstairs?”

Mewburn shook his head.

“No, I can’t,” he said, gloomily. “It seems to me that the game is pretty well up.”

“To be sure! Range will throw up his cards directly. My dear boy, can’t you see? Our behaviour to our brother will look quite rosy. What do we do?—call in the best help in the neighbourhood—so the surgeon thinks. What does Range do? I say again. The maddest act possible, and stamps himself in the neighbourhood as what we set about.”

Just then there was a ring at the gate bell, and soon after Jane brought in a card.

"Gentleman to see you, sir," she said, as she handed the card to Sheldrake.

The latter frowned as he read aloud, "'Reverend Frederick Farleigh.' Who's he?"

"The curate at the little church," said Sarah Pannell.

"Ah!" said Sheldrake, with a sneer, "I see. But what does he want here?"

"Subscriptions for some fund or another!" said Sarah, contemptuously.

"So early in the morning?" said Sheldrake, uneasily. "No; I don't think it's that. He must have heard the report, and come to have it confirmed. Men of his kind have an unpleasant way of getting to the bottom of everything fresh. What shall we do?"

"Say we're out, or engaged," cried Mewburn.

"No, no! we had better see him," said Sheldrake. "Show him in the drawing-room, Jane, and we will come."

Just about that time Arthur Range, who had been suffering bitter mental, as well as bodily, agony, after lying for a long time in silence, suddenly moaned forth a few words.

It seemed as if he was in utter forgetfulness of the presence of Pannell, for there was a good deal of fever, and a touch of delirium, consequent upon the terrible excitement of the night and his severe injury.

"Did you speak, Range, old fellow?" said Pannell, in his frank, cheery voice.

There was no reply, for Range lay staring wildly up at the ceiling.

"And he, too, thinks me mad!" he cried at last in a piteous voice.

"Why, of course he does!" said Pannell, good-humouredly. "What person in his senses would not say a man was mad who took a header off the top of a house like this?"

Range started, as if awakened by his words, gazed at him for a few moments wildly, and then closed his eyes.

Pannell watched him with a good-tempered, sympathetic look upon his countenance, and then, after refilling his pipe, proceeded to make use of his great strength to bend the filed-through bar accurately back into its place.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE BREAD THROWN UPON THE WATERS.

SHELDRAKE and Sarah Pannell entered the drawing-room that they had comfortably furnished with Range's money, to find a young-looking clergyman, with rather a thin, careworn look, and deeply-cut lines about the corners of his eyes and mouth, walking up and down.

Sheldrake gave the card he held a wave towards a chair, and as soon as they were seated treated the visit as one of ceremony, in spite of the early hour, and waited for the demand he expected for some parochial expense, which he intended to accept and respond to, for reasons of his own.

"Most delightful spring morning," he said.

"Yes, exactly," said the visitor, in a quick, firm manner. "We have not had the pleasure of meeting before, Mr. Range, due, perhaps, to our both being new-comers. It is my fault."

"Oh, pray don't name it!" said Sheldrake, noting that the visitor's eyes were fixed for an instant upon his clerical garb.

"The fact is," said the visitor, "I am here upon a rather unpleasant mission. I must be frank with you."

"Pray do," said Sheldrake. "Is it—shall my sister-in-law leave us?"

"Perhaps—if the lady will excuse me."

"There is no need to apologise," said Sarah, rising with dignity; and the young clergyman rose to open the door for her and bow, colouring slightly as he met her eye in passing.

"Is it anything very serious?" said Sheldrake. "If you want help I must decline. I belong to rather a peculiar branch of the Established Church in the United States, and I make it a rule never to undertake clerical duty during my stay in England, on my brother's account."

"It is that latter," said the visitor. "You said your brother's account?"

"Exactly. He is an invalid," said Sheldrake, whose acting was perfect in its simplicity; and he never excited suspicion by saying too much.

"I presume we mean the same patient. The fact is, Mr. Range, several of my parishioners have been talking about your house, notably one Isaac King, a butcher, who reports to me that there was a very terrible scene enacted here last night. Is this, may I ask, a private asylum?"

"Oh, dear no!" replied Sheldrake, calmly. "I am not surprised at the village people talking about such matters. Yes, there was a terrible scene enacted. My poor brother had one of his periodical fits, and—ah! I don't like to talk about it," he said, shuddering. "He literally jumped from the top of the house!"

"Horrible!" muttered the visitor.

"Fortunately, it was into that great tree, the cedar, and its boughs saved him. He has got off with a broken arm. Perhaps you know Mr. Harrington, the surgeon? He has just gone, after setting the poor fellow's arm."

"Oh, yes! I know Mr. Harrington," said the visitor, watching Sheldrake keenly.

"I don't know whether I ought to resent your interference," said Sheldrake, smiling. "Perhaps I ought, but I suppose you mean well?"

"Of course, and I beg that you will not resent it. This matter having taken place here, in a parish of which I have the care, and in the face of the atrocities that have been committed under the shield of the word lunacy, I felt bound to try and investigate the matter."

"Quite right, my dear sir," said Sheldrake in his most frank manner. "You had a little suspicion then that there was something wrong?"

"To be frank, sir, I had."

"Ah, yes! Well, I suppose any one outside would think so, for there is something so horrible in keeping a man shut up behind iron bars like some savage creature," said Sheldrake, sadly, "but what are we to do, my dear sir? I don't see why I should enter into all these particulars to a stranger, but you are a clergyman."

"Believe me it is from no inquisitive motives that I call, it is from a desire to do that which is right."

"I believe you, sir," said Sheldrake bowing; "but, as I was saying, what are we to do? It is horrible to send your own flesh and blood to a private asylum, especially in a case like my brother's, where for weeks he will be as sane as we are, and then break out into a violent fit requiring strong repression. You know what keepers are and the treatment people receive."

"Yes, I have heard a great deal," said the visitor.

"Exactly," continued Sheldrake in a deep, emotional voice. "Well, we felt that we could not bear the thought of such a life for the poor fellow, so we gave up our own, took this place, and have him entirely under our own eye with a resident medical man, who devotes himself entirely to my brother's case, and gives us great hope."

"He gives you hope?"

"Certainly, and I feel that he is right. A year ago my poor brother was raving in these fits every week, telling people that he was enormously rich, and going to be married to a lady—an English lady. Then he would break out and commence spending every penny he could obtain, and we were compelled to place him under restraint to keep him out of mischief. Designing people would have got hold of him, and his little fortune would have gone like water into the earth."

"A sad story this, Mr. Range," said the young clergyman, whose suspicions seemed to be completely disarmed.

"Sad? Yes, but we have hope. I believe he will be quite restored at last. The painful point is that most common one in lunacy; the poor fellow has taken an intense dislike to all whom he used to love. He refuses to know us, and accuses us of being leagued against him, as we are, poor fellow!"—here there was a deep sigh—"for his good."

"I have heard it is a very common thing."

"But none the less painful, and of course strangers naturally feel sympathy for a man in his position, and are ready to believe him."

"It is the idea that cruelty is practised arouses people's suspicions," said the clergyman, watching Sheldrake narrowly.

"That and the story he loves to dwell upon, that he is a kind of Monte Christo, a man of fabulous wealth, and money makes such an impression upon the vulgar."

The visitor bowed his head.

"He promises large sums to anybody who will help him away from us, and the troubles we have had before of this kind make us very careful to lead a retired life till he recovers."

"You are from the States?"

"Oh, yes! but we thought we'd come over and try the change, and more equable climate of England."

So far Sheldrake's acting had been admirable. The visitor had come in the full belief that something was wrong; and that an unfortunate was being kept a prisoner; but the story he heard was so plausible, so simply and frankly told, that suspicion was completely disarmed; and the Rev. Frederick Farleigh felt that his zeal was misplaced, that a crusade against such a man as this would be Quixotic, so that nothing remained for him to do but apologise, and, after a few words of sympathy, take his leave.

But something else was to happen.

Clever people who prey upon their fellow-creatures are, as a rule, adepts in villainy; but every now and then they fail, not from want of skill but from being too clever.

Every now and then too, when a murder is planned and committed, the culprit is detected through his over-scheming.

In short, villainy often comes to grief through too much acting.

Frank Sheldrake was one of those men to whom judges are wont to say, "You possessed every qualification for winning a high position in life, but you chose to devote your talents to dishonest practices, and now you reap the reward."

Sheldrake as an honest man might have risen high, but he chose the other career, looking upon mankind as pigeons, to whom he played the hawk. Clever and scheming to a degree, with his mental organisation veined, as it were, with that low type of ability to scheme known as cunning, he too could be too clever—be too cunning—and overreach himself, as he did now in his endeavour to completely disarm suspicion.

For, as the visitor rose and held out his hand, he said quietly, and in the full belief that the offer would be declined,

"You will come and see my poor brother?"

The Rev. Frederick Farleigh did not shrink back and say, "Oh, no! it would be too painful," or "I think my presence might irritate him," but exclaimed at once,

"Yes, I should like it much."

Sheldrake was not taken aback, he nodded and smiled.

"This way," he said, feeling that to make any excuse now would be perdition, but mentally cursing his slip as he spoke. "Be perfectly calm with him. You need fear no violence. Humour him if

he asks you to write to people of title; and don't seem to express the slightest doubt if he tells you he is worth millions of money. He may not allude to these matters, but he probably will. He is sure to say that we are a set of rogues and cheats who keep him in prison, the doctor being the worst of the party. There, now I think you are prepared. By the way though, side with him against us. Don't doubt him in the least."

"Ah! doctor," he said, as they encountered Mewburn in the hall, "this is our friend the vicar."

"I beg pardon," said the visitor, "curate."

"Curate," said Sheldrake, smiling. "He has expressed a desire to see your patient. We may go, I suppose?"

"Well—er—" began Mewburn hesitatingly. Then, in obedience to a look from Sheldrake, he went on, "Ye—s, I think you may. Be perfectly calm, and listen to all he says. He is very clear now. I quite hope the shock of his fall may prove a sort of counter-irritant and do him good. Don't allude to ladies if you can help it. It is a singular thing, sir, that an ordinary-looking girl like our servant can go in and out of my patient's chamber at any time; but if Mrs. Range, his sister-in-law, or any other well-dressed lady, comes in sight he is furious. Thanks, no, I will not come up again. I would not stop long."

"We will not," said Sheldrake blandly. "This way, Mr. Farleigh. Fine old house this; I took a fancy to it directly I saw it. Reminds me of our Boston. The old American folks took your English fashions over, and there they are still in the forms of our houses, in spite of the French fads and Parisian ideas."

"Here we are," he said, opening a baize door, and then passing through another, down a passage to a door at the end. "Obliged to be prison-like as to locks and bolts, Mr. Farleigh; otherwise he has perfect freedom, and we have given him a splendidly airy room."

He passed in, and held the door open for the visitor to enter.

Pannell was seated by the window, book in one hand, pipe in the other, watching the progress of his flower-garden.

Range was lying half asleep upon his bed, but ready to start into wakefulness and stare at those who entered the room.

His face was slightly flushed, and there were a few scratches upon his closely-shaven head as he raised it, gazing straight at the visitor, who advanced quietly with a smile upon his face, and with outstretched hand.

In an instant Range's countenance changed; his eyes flashed, his lips parted, and in spite of his injured arm he started up in the bed.

"At last! A friend at last!" he cried passionately.

Range's new visitor gave him a pitying look, and then half turned to Sheldrake, while Pannell rose in a lumbering way and looked from one to the other.

"Now, sir! Quick!" cried Range. "Listen to me. I am kept a prisoner here by these men."

The young clergyman seemed to be petrified, his eyes fixed upon the strangely excited and convulsed face.

It was all strange to him, so smoothly shaven, like the prisoner's head. The voice seemed like the echo of one he had heard once before, but the face was not familiar. No, he could not recognise it, and he involuntarily shook his head.

Sheldrake looked uneasy, and turned to Pannell, who gave his broad shoulders a shrug, while his face seemed to say, "Well, it is no doing of mine; you brought him up here."

"I think," said Sheldrake hastily, "that perhaps it would be better to——"

"Silence!" cried Range fiercely. Then turning to the visitor, "Oh, man, man!" he cried, "do you not know me again?"

The visitor again shook his head.

"Forgotten? So soon? Oh, Heaven! is there no help for such a one as I?"

"My dear sir——" the visitor began.

"Do you not know me, I say?" cried Range, interrupting him angrily. "Range—Arthur Range?"

"Yes," cried the young clergyman quickly, "it is, indeed, the same. I ought to have known you at once, but——"

"Mr. Farleigh," whispered Sheldrake, plucking him by the sleeve, "I must ask you, for his sake, to come away. I am afraid that the poor fellow is going to have one of his worst fits."

"You do—you do remember me then?" cried Range, with a hysterical cry.

"Yes, yes, of course; but, my poor fellow——"

"Look at him!" cried Sheldrake. "Mr. Farleigh, you see his eyes? It is not right to stay with him now. My dear John, lay him back gently, for the blood to get its proper flow. Mr. Farleigh, I beg, I must insist. No: pray come down."

He spoke with a blandly calm air, and went to the door with an appealing look at the visitor, who had advanced to Range's side.

"My dear sir," cried Sheldrake more firmly, "pray come down."

"No, not yet!" cried the visitor, excitedly. "I know this gentleman well: I have good cause. Thank God! Thank God! It is my turn now."

CHAPTER LXXVI.

UNCLE WASH LOOKS ROUND.

"Now, first of all," said Uncle Wash—"yew'll excuse me, my dear. It's a bad habit; but I'm what you see, and I can always get on better with a bit in my mouth."

He took out an old shining brass tobacco-box and a clasp-knife, and proceeded to cut himself off a piece of hard cake tobacco; but he paused, closed box and knife with a snap, and put both back in his pocket.

"No," he said, sharply; "not now. First of all, then, yew've got woods and fields and game about here?"

"Yes," said Judith, eagerly.

"And gardeners and hunters?"

"Keepers," said Judith.

"Same thing I mean. Haven't got a smart chap as has been about in the woods all his life, hev you?"

"Yes: Sam Burton," said Judith.

"Has to do with dogs and game and such?"

"Yes!" cried Judith. "Shall I send for him at once?"

"No, thankye, my dear. I'm here just as a visitor, please. Yew take me out and show me the grounds, both of yew, and you can let me come upon your Sam Burton, and tell him to show me the woods."

"I see," cried Judith. "Let me put on my hat."

She ran out of the room, and, as soon as they were alone, Uncle Wash got up and laid his hand on Sir Robert's shoulder.

"God bless you!" he said, "for a true gentleman. I won't do more than I can help; but I must find my boy."

"Yes," said Sir Robert, hoarsely. "You must find him; but, for heaven's sake, man, mind what you are about. If the captain be innocent it is a horrible charge."

"I shan't bring no charge again him till I know I'm right, Sir Robert. And, mind, I don't say it's murder. Them two seem to me to have fought, and I know that my boy might have killed the captain. It shall be fair play; but I must find my boy."

"But are you sure he is not about London?"

"I'm sure he never left this place of his own free will."

"Hush! here she is," cried Sir Robert.

Judith entered, and, as if Uncle Wash were an ordinary visitor, the party went into the hall, where Sir Robert took hat and stick, and they walked out on to the lawn.

As it happened, they had not gone fifty yards on their way towards the keeper's lodge when at a turn they came suddenly upon Carleigh, who looked very pale and haggard; but he recovered himself directly.

It was awkward this meeting, and Judith felt a curious shrinking sensation; but Sir Robert said, in his abrupt manner—

"This is my brother's ward, Captain Carleigh, Mr. Range. George Carleigh, this is Mr. Washington Range, from the United States."

Carleigh raised his hat stiffly, but did not offer his hand, while Uncle Wash let his hang down by his side as he looked searchingly at Carleigh with his cold, hard eyes.

"Any relative of Mr. Arthur Range?" said Carleigh, coldly.

"His uncle," said Sir Robert, shortly. "Come along, Mr. Range, and we'll look round."

They passed on, and Carleigh entered the house.

"An awkward encounter," said Sir Robert; "but it had to be got over."

"Hah!" ejaculated Uncle Wash. "He didn't move a muscle. I'm not so sure about this scent as I was, Colonel."

"You are not?" said Judith.

"No, my dear. He'd know why I came down, and if it was as I think, one would fancy he'd have shown something. He must be a cool one if I am right. But we shall see."

The beauties of the place had but little interest for Uncle Wash as they crossed the grounds and entered the woodland path that led to Sam Burton's lodge; and he walked on very quiet and thoughtful, till the baying of the dogs in their kennels told of their approach to the cottage.

On reaching it, they did not find Sam Burton, but were fortunate enough to run against him soon after, gun under his arm, and he stopped short as they came up.

"This is a gentleman from America, Burton," said Sir Robert. "I want you to show him over the woods, and tell him all about the game. Answer him any questions about the place. I suppose you would like quite a long walk, Mr. Range?"

"Yes, a very long one," said Uncle Wash, smiling, and making a mental note of the change that came over the keeper's face as he heard the name.

"Then we shall see you at dinner," said Sir Robert. "Good-bye for the present."

"Good-bye," said the old man, shortly; and Judith, who was trembling with eagerness that she vainly strove to hide, took Sir Robert's arm, leaving the old American and Sam Burton face to face.

"Trail's getting clear again," said the old man to himself, as he looked searchingly at the keeper. "You're flinching, my man. If I'm wrong about the captain, I'm right here. You know something, and you've got to tell it, and pretty sharp."

Then aloud—

"Now then, my lad, where shall we go first?"

"Anywher you like, sir," said Burton, respectfully, and feeling uncomfortable under the sharp, searching glance.

"Oh! I think I'll leave it to you, my lad," said Uncle Wash. "Show me the woods, and the water, and the pheasants."

"This way, sir," said Burton; and for about an hour he led the visitor here and there, pointing out the beauties of the place, and gradually growing more comfortable as his suspicions that this must be some relative of Arthur Range on a search began to be lulled.

For the old man seemed to take great interest in everything, admiring the pheasants whenever a rocketeer flew up, and telling, in return for the information imparted, little anecdotes about the woods out in Colorado.

Oddly enough, the stream took the old man's attention more than any other part of the estate: and, although Burton tried to take him in another direction, he struck down a narrow path leading towards the Wilderness, saying—

"Ah! I like this. Puts me in mind of home. You should see one of our rocky cañons, my lad. This is pretty—this little narrow

gulch of a place; just the sort of spot where I've often washed in the stream-bed for gold."

"And found any, sir!"

"Oh, yes! but not worth the work. Yes: this is pretty; but some of our places are a thousand times as big. I like this. We'll walk down here."

"Mr. Arthur used to like this part," thought Burton, feeling a little moist about the forehead.

As the thought crossed his mind, Uncle Wash turned sharply round and looked him full in the face as they stood just above where the rough cultivation of the Wilderness began.

"Say!" he exclaimed; "of course you knew my nephew, Mr. Arthur Lincoln Range?"

Burton was speechless, and his face assumed a white-clayey hue.

"Why, what are you looking so white about, man, eh?"

"I've never got back my colour since my accident, sir. Shot in the back last September. Nearly killed, sir."

"'Deed! Well, it's a bad thing. I've had some nasty shot-wounds myself. You knew my nephew?"

"Yes, sir," said Burton, recovering himself.

"Pretty good with the gun, wasn't he?"

"Don't know, sir. Left here 'fore the shooting begun."

"Did he?" said Uncle Wash, looking him full in the face.

"Yes, sir," said Burton, stoutly. "All of a sudden like—one night."

"Yes; all of a sudden like—one night, eh?" cried Uncle Wash, with his whole manner changing; and, catching the keeper by the collar, he exclaimed, "That's a lie!"

Burton stared at him aghast; there was something so fierce in the old man's way; but he recovered himself, and said surlily—

"Gents as come to see Sir Harry don't speak to his servants like that."

"I'm not a gentleman, my lad. I'm Arthur Range's uncle, come to seek him out. He didn't leave here one night. He didn't go away; and I've come to find out all about it, so now let's have the truth!"

Burton stared at him with a dogged expression coming over his face, and he did not flinch now.

"Do you hear?" cried Uncle Wash; "out with the truth! You know where he is."

"Did Sir Harry say you weer to talk to me that how, sir?"

"I say you know the truth: so out with it! Where is my nephew?"

"I dunno," said Sam, stolidly.

"You do know! Now look here, my good fellow, you're a fine, well-built chap and a clever gamekeeper, but you've got a face that speaks as plain as a book. It's telling me all the time that you do know all about it. Now look here: between man and man, I've come down here quietly, without the police, to sift this matter out,

and you've got to shovel while I rock the cradle. You've got to tell me everything."

Burton's eyes contracted and his lips tightened, but he did not speak.

"My nephew was a good fellow to you—open-handed and that sort of thing?"

Burton nodded.

"Gave you many a dollar?"

"Sov'rins!" said Burton.

"Ah! to be sure. He'd plenty, and he'd give to those who hadn't. You liked him, then?"

"Oh, yes!—Everybody liked him, sir."

"Everybody? Did the captain like him?"

Burton was silent.

"No, he didn't then. Now look here, Sam Burton—you know all about this?"

"I don't know nothing, and I wean't say I do," said Sam.

"Then you've been paid to hold your tongue—that's it!"

Sam smiled.

"It's got to come out, my lad," said Uncle Wash, in a threatening tone; "and it will be better for you if you speak."

Sam remained silent, and Uncle Wash scrutinised the stubborn face before him. Then, jumping to the conclusion that threatening would be useless, he changed his attack.

"Look here, my lad, you've got a sweetheart?"

Burton nodded.

"Suppose you were snatched away, what would she feel?"

Burton drew a long breath as he thought of Milly and how nearly she had been left to mourn his loss.

"Think, too, of them as care for you besides. Sam Burton, I'm an American; but far back my people were Yorkshire folk as went over. We always like the Yorkshire men, because they're stubborn and honest and straightforward. Now just think I'm one of you. I love that boy like my own son, and I'd give the world to see him safe and sound. He come here, and he's never been seen to go away. I ask you, as a man, to help me."

Burton's lip quivered a little.

"What do you want—money? There, take off your hat when you've done what I ask, and I'll pile it up with sovereigns. Come—look here!" the old man cried, taking out a pocket-book; "here's notes! Here's a hundred pounds for you if you'll tell me all you know; and I'll give you what you like after he's found."

Burton shook his head, and his hands clasped the barrels of his gun.

"It's got to come out, man! Ah! You had a hand in it yourself."

Burton's lips tightened.

"You're afraid of the consequences—the law, eh?"

Burton did not stir a muscle.

"If that's it, get your sweetheart—I'll give you money—take her

to Liverpool, and take passage over to the States. I'll find you a good home out there, and you shall never know want. I swear it. So help me God!"

The old man took off his broad felt hat and looked up reverently towards heaven.

"I don't know, mester, and I can't tell."

"You are lying, Samuel Burton!" said Uncle Wash, "and you know you are lying! You'll have to speak: so speak now! For Heaven's sake, man, put me out of my misery at once!"

The old man's agony was terrible to witness as he clung to the keeper's arm, and Sam Burton, weakened by his long illness, trembled from the effects of the contagious emotion. He seemed on the point of speaking, and his lips parted, when Uncle Wash exclaimed—

"There, you will speak? For Miss Judith's sake, tell me all!"

The words were unfortunate; for Burton's lips closed tightly, and his eyes contracted more and more.

"You will tell me?"

"I've got nowt to tell."

"Then you did it yourself," cried Uncle Wash, savagely, "and the law shall take its course!"

Sam Burton smiled.

"What am I to do to move you? Am I to bring detective police down here to search the place and arrest people right and left, man?"

"No!" cried Burton, quickly; "don't do that."

He was off his guard.

"That will do," said Uncle Wash, grimly. "You've let it out, my lad. He is here, dead—buried somewhere, and you could show me the spot."

Burton stared at him blankly.

"Did you shoot my boy?"

"Me! Shoot him!" cried Burton, scornfully. "I wouldn't have hurt a hair of the bright young lad's he-ad."

"Then you'll tell me all about how it happened?"

"I wean't tell ye a word," cried Sam, stubbornly. "I don't know."

He strode off hastily down the vale; but Uncle Wash kept at his side.

"No, my lad, you don't go," he said. "You've got to speak out and make a clean breast of it, and you and I don't part till you dew. There, you'll think a bit. Think that it's better to tell me all quietly than for the police to hunt it out."

Sam shook his head, and they were fast approaching the rustic bridge and the scene of the encounter; but Burton would not go by there, and struck off to the right, so as to avoid the spot.

"You've got to tell me, you know," said the old man, linking his arm in the keeper's and refusing to be shaken off. "Look here! I'll hold you free. I'll keep it quiet from every one but Miss Judith and Sir Robert. They know I am questioning you."

"It's a lie!" cried Burton, stoutly.

"A lie? Well, they brought me to you, my lad. Look here.

they think as I think, that the captain and my nephew quarrelled—you know what about."

Burton shook himself free, and turned and faced his pursuer with dilating eyes.

"They think that?" he cried.

"Yes!" exclaimed Uncle Wash, "and it's true. I can see it is. Now, will you speak and tell me all?"

"No!" cried Sam, furiously. "Not a word. Thou may'st say what thou likes, and do what thou likes, but I don't know nowt, and I've got nowt to say."

"Ah! you don't get away from me like that," cried Uncle Wash, making a grasp at him as Sam tried to get away. "I've got yew, and if it takes ten years I'll have the truth out of you!"

"Yow wean't," cried Sam, sturdily; and there was a moment's struggle. Then the keeper's feet glided from under him, and he fell with a heavy crashing noise through some past year's ferns and brambles into a narrow rift like a natural ditch, one barrel of his gun going off in the fall.

The old man bent down and offered his hand; but after a minute Sam climbed out, white with rage, which changed to a look of bitter anguish as, unnerved by the fall, the shock of the accidental explosion of his gun, the ordeal to which he had been subjected, and something more, and all consequent upon his not having recovered his full strength, he began to wring his hands.

"The coward! The hound!" he cried, with his pale face working. "He's no man! I know'd it—I felt it! Shot! Shot!"

"Who by?" cried the old man, excitedly.

"The captain! I know'd it; I could be sworn he did! Look, sir, look!" cried Sam, piteously; and, catching the old man by the arm, he pointed down into the hollow from which he had struggled—"he saw her scratching 'bout the place, and while I was down and weak he shot un dead."

"Why, man," cried Uncle Wash, after shudderingly gazing down into the stony rift, "they're the bones of a dog!"

"Yes, Bess! My dog! The best dog that ever lived. Why, she was 'most like a Christian, sir. My poor owd Bess!"

Sam Burton sank upon his knees by the side of the rift, bent down, and lifted from below the skull and collar of the dog, and then crouched there with the weak tears streaming down his ckeeks.

Uncle Wash stood by, respecting the poor fellow's grief over the lost companion of many a long night's watch, and then laid his hand gently on the keeper's shoulder.

"Then you think the captain shot your dog?"

"Ay!" cried Sam, excitedly, as he started to his feet; "as surely as I believe he shot me—a cur!—a coward! Look here!" he roared, holding up a bone with a shot-corn embedded in it. "Chilled shot, sir; nobody used 'em but him. My poor Bess, who was worth a hundred of him! He see her skretching down below. She scented it out, and——"

Sam Burton's countenance changed from rage to blank dismay, and he stopped short, with the dog's skull in his hand, staring at his keen companion.

"Whether it was murder or fair fight, Sam Burton, your dog scented out the place where my poor nephew lay, and Captain Carleigh shot the poor brute to keep his secret."

"I nivver said so!" cried Sam, stubbornly.

"You did, my lad, and it must come out, as sure as that did there." He pointed down into the rift.

"I can see, my lad, now; and I like you the better for it," continued Uncle Wash, slowly. "We over yonder have heered tell of the faithful servants your English families have—men who would die sooner than betray a secret that they have to keep. You're one of them, my lad, but you couldn't keep it. Something more than you think of has made you speak."

"I didn't speak!" cried Sam, again, doggedly.

"You kept quiet so as to save your master and mistress from this trouble, and, perhaps, Miss Judith, too; but it is all out now, and I have found nearly all I want."

"Here, stop!" cried Sam, as the old man turned away. "What are you going to do?"

"Make a keen-scented dog show me what you want to hide, Sam Burton."

"No, no, sir, don't—don't do that! My lady's half dying now!" cried Sam, passionately. "I'm not mysen, sir. The wound's open again, and I'm weak and ill. I didn't mean to let it out. I'd hev sooner died. It'll kill Sir Harry! Pray, pray don't do that!"

"Will you show me quietly, then, all you know?"

"I wean't!" cried Sam, fiercely. "It's all a lie—there's nowt to show!"

"We'll see what a dog will say to that!" cried Uncle Wash. "The dog shot and hidden here. We must be pretty close. There: I've found the trail at last!"

"Stop!" cried Sam, furiously; and he stooped, snatched up his gun, and cocked the remaining barrel. "I'll not have my mester hurt wi' this. I don't know what I've said—I don't care what I've said; but you keep back, or, as I live, I'll lay you dead beside my dog!"

With eyes starting and features convulsed, Sam Burton stepped back a couple of paces and presented the gun at Uncle Wash's breast.

"My lad," said the old man, calmly taking a step forward and pressing the barrel of the gun aside, "yew're half mad. I told you it must come out. There's where he lies, then—down that path yew try to stop. You've shown me the place. My poor boy's lying somewhere down beside that stream."

Sam Burton lowered the gun with a groan as Uncle Wash gazed firmly in his face, and walked by him slowly down the narrow gully side, making unconsciously straight for the landslip in the bottom.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

NOT SATISFIED YET.

"WELL?" said Sir Robert, as the old American walked into the library an hour later.

Uncle Wash went right up to him with a grey, wan look in his countenance and laid his hand upon the General's arm.

"What's the good of money?" he said, enigmatically. "What's the good of having made a mighty pile of dollars for that boy, and for it all to come to this?"

"Have you found anything?"

Uncle Wash nodded.

"What: has Sam Burton told you?"

"Not exactly, and yet he has, Colonel. I've 'bout wormed it out of him."

"But are you sure, man?"

"So sure, Colonel, that I wish it hadn't been true. But thar it is, and it's no use to shirk it. He's lying out yonder down in the——"

"Judy!" cried Sir Robert, clapping his hand on old Range's lips; "what are you doing here?"

The poor girl had come in unobserved, and had heard the last words, standing rigid as if the current of her young life-blood had suddenly stopped its movement, so white was she, even to the lips.

"Go on, Mr. Range," she said, at last.

"No, no! my dear," said the old American, quickly. "Yew go away to yewre room. This is man's business, my dear."

There was a dead silence, during which Sir Robert put his arm tenderly round Judith and tried to lead her to the door.

"Leave it to us, my dear. Go to your room as he says," whispered the old General. "He's quite right."

He bent down and kissed her as she exclaimed, with a passionate sob—

"Quite right, uncle, when it was perhaps through me that he lost his life?"

"Hush, my dear! we don't know that yet."

"We do!" cried Judith, whose whole manner seemed changed. Her face flushed, and there was a strange light in her eyes as she turned to Uncle Wash.

"I shall stay," she cried, firmly. "I will know the worst. Oh, Arthur!" she moaned forth, in a wild and piteous cry; and, turning her back to the two men, she laid her arm across her eyes and stood there sobbing for a few moments, till Sir Robert took her tenderly in his arms.

His touch roused her, and, drawing herself up, she kissed him.

"Thank you, uncle, dear," she said, mournfully; and then, turning to Uncle Wash, she said, softly, and with a strange despairing look in her eyes, "I did love him very much!"

The old American took her hand.

"I was very foolish, and—I don't know why I said what I did."

Uncle Wash kissed her little hand, and stood looking down in her piteous eyes as she gazed up at him as if asking for some comfort—some words of hope.

Then a change came over her face, which turned cold and hard of aspect as she said harshly—

"Go on. I want to know all."

The two old men exchanged glances, and then Uncle Wash told all he knew.

"I was sure of it," said Judith, hoarsely; "I was sure of it."

"Poor lad! Poor brother Harry!" sighed Sir Robert, drawing in a painful breath. Then aloud—"Well, Mr. Range, this looks bad; but we are not sure yet."

"No," said the old American, "we are not sure yet, but we soon shall be. Who's this?"

The door had unclosed, and, looking bright and cheerful, Sir Harry entered the room.

"I thought you would be here, my dear," he began. "I beg pardon. A friend of yours, my dear Bob?"

He took in the disturbed looks of all present, and, with great delicacy, was about to withdraw.

"My brother. He must know all," said Sir Robert to the visitor, and Uncle Wash nodded shortly.

"I did not know you were engaged," said Sir Harry. "Go to Lady Fanshaw when you are at liberty, my dear."

"Stop, Harry!" said Sir Robert, crossing to him and taking his hand. "This is for you to know."

Sir Harry looked at him wonderingly. Then, drawing himself up, with his old military bearing returning, he took a chair and stood there holding by its back as Sir Robert went on.

"This is Mr. Washington Range—Mr. Arthur Range's uncle."

The two men bowed and Sir Harry courteously extended his hand.

"I am glad to see you, sir," he said.

"Stop a bit, Sir Harry Fanshaw," said Uncle Wash, not taking the hand. "Shall I tell him, Colonel, or will you?"

"I'll speak," said Sir Robert, hastily. "Look here, Harry, bear up, my lad. It's a trouble. But we are men. I have something bad to say."

Sir Harry looked at him sharply, and then darting a pitying look at Uncle Wash, he once more extended his hand.

"Bad news of your nephew, Mr. Range?"

Uncle Wash nodded and Judith stood white and trembling.

"To be brief, Harry," said Sir Robert, "here is a dreadful trouble for us—not proved, but suspected: Arthur Range disappeared from here suddenly!"

"Yes; he left without bidding us good-bye."

"He has not been seen since," said Sir Robert, solemnly.

"Good Heavens!" cried Sir Harry, taking a step towards the visitor.

"And Mr. Range is here to seek him, believing that he never left your grounds; and that he was murdered!"

"I didn't say that, Colonel," said Uncle Wash, slowly; "killed—p'raps it was in fair fight."

"Oh, it is impossible! My dear brother—what! do you believe this?"

"Harry, dear lad," said Sir Robert, affectionately, "we know nothing certain; but——"

"Speak out! quick!" cried Sir Harry, imperiously.

"The fact is—Range loved Judy here and proposed to her."

"He dared!" cried Sir Harry, furiously; and his eyes flashed as he turned to Uncle Wash and then to Judith.

"Don't say 'dared,' dear Uncle Harry!" cried Judith, going to him. "He loved me very dearly, ever since we met at Malaypore—and I loved him too!"

"But—my child! George! Stop, it is no time to discuss that. Go on, Robert."

Sir Harry's manner was entirely changed, and he stood there erect and stern as Sir Robert continued—

"We fear that George and he met somewhere down in the Wilderness, and that there was a fatal result."

"Go on," said Sir Harry.

"And that George, in his agony and horror at the consequences of a meeting without seconds, concealed the matter."

"Ring that bell," said Sir Harry, sternly. "Judith, this is no place for you."

"Uncle," she cried, "I must hear all!"

Sir Harry frowned.

"Mr. Range," he said gravely, as he mastered a feeling of resentment, "you shall be convinced that your accusation is without foundation. My ward—there! he is as it were my son—Captain Carleigh, is the soul of honour, an officer and a gentleman. You shall hear his words."

The butler appeared.

"Josephs, ask Captain Carleigh to step here. Pray, be seated, Mr. Range," continued Sir Harry, courteously. "I can sympathise with you in your distress of mind; but, believe me, you are wrong."

"I'll stand," said Uncle Wash, quietly; and a painful silence ensued, which continued till Carleigh's step was heard in the hall, and directly after he entered and glanced quickly from one to the other.

There was a peculiar whiteness about his nether lip; otherwise his aspect was perfectly calm, and he looked quite cheerful as he advanced.

"George," said Sir Harry, in magisterial tones, "this gentleman, Mr. Range, has come here on a strange mission."

"Indeed! I did meet Mr. Range before;" and he looked him full in the face without flinching.

"It has just come to my knowledge——" continued Sir Harry——
"Judith, I would have spared you this."

"Uncle, I must stay!"

"As you will. George, it has come to my knowledge, I say, that there was some ill-feeling between you and Mr. Arthur Range."

"Ill-feeling!" said Carleigh, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. "I don't know about that. We were never friends."

"Did you two ever have angry words together—shortly before he left here?"

"Yes," said Carleigh. "I suppose I need not state the cause."

"I believe we know that," said Sir Harry, who seemed to be growing more stern. "Now, tell me, my boy, did your quarrel assume a very serious aspect?"

"No."

"Hah!" ejaculated Sir Harry, with a look of relief. "You did not have a meeting afterwards—you did not fight?"

"Fight? Oh, no!"

"There! Mr. Range: are you satisfied?" said Sir Harry.

"No, sir. Nor yet half."

"Then you shall be," said Sir Harry, haughtily. "George, my boy, this gentleman announces to us that his nephew has never been seen since he left here."

"Indeed!" said Carleigh, coolly.

"And he believes that you and Mr. Range had a meeting in the wood, that you slew him, and hid your——act!"

Carleigh turned ghastly pale; but he burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"Absurd! Ridiculous!" he cried. "I saw Mr. Arthur Range go off for a walk that last evening, and I have not seen him since."

"There, Mr. Range," said Sir Harry. "You have heard the answer to your charge from an officer and a gentleman, whose word is beyond doubt. Now, are you satisfied?"

"No!" said Uncle Wash, firmly.

"Not satisfied now?"

"No, sir. Look at him!"

Sir Harry turned sharply, and a chill ran through him as he saw the ghastly pallor increasing in Carleigh's face; but the latter made an effort to master his emotion, and spoke steadily, but with the dew standing on his forehead as he was conscious of the searching look of all present.

"Look at me!" he said. "Well, such a charge is startling. I don't think I felt worse the first time I went under fire."

"Sir Harry Fanshaw, I am not satisfied," said Uncle Wash, firmly. "My dear, will yew leave us now?"

"No," said Judith, crossing to his side and placing her hand upon his arm. "I shall stay by you till this mystery is cleared."

"My dear child!" cried Sir Harry, angrily.

"Let her be, Harry!" cried Sir Robert warmly. "Now, Mr. Range, what do you want?"

"I want that place searched down there in that bit of a gulch where the streams run—well searched by men with spades. Sir Harry Fanshaw, as the nearest relative of that poor boy, I demand this of you."

"Preposterous!" cried Carleigh.

"Be silent, George!" said Sir Harry sternly. "This is my affair."

Sir Harry stood with his brows knit for a few moments in silence.

"Sir," he said at last as he broke the painful silence, "this is bringing a terrible scandal upon a private family. Such a search as you propose will be known far and wide. Lady Fanshaw is very weak from a long illness, it would be terrible to her."

"It is terrible to me, Sir Harry Fanshaw, to be suffering this horrible suspense."

"But it may be—it is only a weak suspicion."

Uncle Wash's lips tightened till his mouth was one thin line.

"Sir Harry Fanshaw, I ask you as an English gentleman to have this search made privately by us and one or two trusted men. I want to spare you the pain of setting the police to work."

"The police!" cried Carleigh, whose face, in spite of his efforts, had become livid.

"Yes, sir, the police," said Uncle Wash. "Come, Sir Harry Fanshaw, meet me frankly, it must come out. You don't know half yet, sir; I have not told you that I have been down at the spot with your keeper."

"With Sam Burton?" cried Carleigh in spite of himself.

"Yes, with Sam Burton, young man," said Uncle Wash, gravely.

"Mr. Range, you are an American," said Sir Harry firmly. "You come to me, an Englishman, and in fairness you shall have your demand."

"My dear Sir Harry!" cried Carleigh.

"What have you to fear, George? There may perhaps be something in this. But tell me, what does Burton say?"

"Nothing except what he is forced," replied Uncle Wash, gravely; "but he knows a great deal."

"Then the poor fellow may have encountered poachers," said Sir Harry, ringing the bell.

The butler appeared.

"Let Burton be fetched here instantly."

There was again a terrible silence till the keeper came in, looking ghastly of face at Carleigh, with whom he exchanged a quick glance.

Uncle Wash saw it, and his face grew harder, if possible, than before.

"Burton," said Sir Harry, "do you know why you are sent for here?"

"Yes, Sir Harry."

"Then speak out. Do you know anything about Mr. Range's disappearance?"

The keeper hesitated for a moment, and then said firmly,

"I don't know nowt, Sir Harry."

Sir Harry looked relieved, and stood thinking for a few minutes.

"That will do," he said. "No, stop! It is late now. To-morrow morning at eight be ready with Macpherson, and——no, there shall be no one else but ourselves. Not a word of this to a soul—not even to Macpherson; I will speak to him."

"Yes, Sir Harry."

"Now go."

The keeper touched his forehead and backed out.

"Now, Mr. Range, may I ask you to wait patiently till to-morrow, when you shall have proof of the folly of your suspicion? Till then, sir, you are my guest."

He left the room with Carleigh, and, unable to bear the agony longer, Judith also glided away.

"Well," said Sir Robert, "what do you think now?"

"Think, sir?" said the old man bitterly; "what do you think? There! you need not tell me, I can see."

Sir Robert shifted uneasily in his chair.

"That keeper's in the business, sir. It was plain enough."

"I'm afraid you are right."

"Yes, I'm right!" said Uncle Wash, sturdily. "I'm on the trail, sure enough. I'm sorry for all your sakes, Sir Robert, but it must be hunted out."

"What are you going to do now, for I suppose that you are right?"

Uncle Wash sat looking full at Sir Robert.

"Yes," he said, "I can trust you. I believe you're one of those sturdy English gentlemen who'd fight against themselves for the sake of being honourable."

"I hope so," said Sir Robert stiffly.

"Well, then, I'll tell you. I'm going to lie low here, just as if I was satisfied; but I'm going down in that gulch to-night to watch, because, if I'm right, there's going to be something done down there to try and throw me off the scent."

"You think so? No."

"I'm sure so. Now, Colonel, are we friends or enemies over this? Are you going to fight for me or against me?"

"Neither," said Sir Robert. "If I fight for you it is almost against my brother. No: it is against him, and for my darling child. Mr. Range, I'm for you in this business to the end."

"Then you'll come down to the wood with me to-night?"

"I will."

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

AN UGLY THREAT.

"My dear sir!" cried Mr. Farleigh, his voice trembling with emotion, which he vainly tried to master as he caught Range's hand in his, "you are so changed—so altered—I could not tell—I—I——"

He choked; his eyes were suffused with the weak tears, and for a few moments there was a pause. Then, stamping his foot in the effort he made over himself to master his emotion, he stood up erect and firm by the bedside as if ready to defend Range against attack.

"Then it is true," he said; "you are kept a prisoner here?"

"Yes, by these men. They pretend that I am mad."

Pannell came forward with an angry glare in his eyes, but Shelldrake touched him on the arm.

"Be still, Jack!" he said, quietly, and with a slight shrug of his shoulders. "It is too late now to prevent a scene." Then, turning to Farleigh—"You have met my brother, then, before?"

"Yes; last summer—in town—when he befriended me—in a way——"

His voice grew husky, and failed him again in the intensity of his emotion; but he mastered it, and, drawing himself up, said firmly:

"Mr. Range, here, played the Good Samaritan to me when I was dying in the great city yonder. My time has come now to pay the debt."

"Indeed!" said Shelldrake, calmly. "He lent you money, then?"

"Yes," said the young clergyman, colouring, but speaking firmly.

"That must have been when he got away, then, John," said Shelldrake. "I wondered how he had spent that cash."

Farleigh caught every word as he turned to Range, who clung to him with his uninjured hand.

"Don't heed what they say," he whispered. "Take some steps at once to set me free. They pretend they are my brothers. They are adventurers—scoundrels. I am enormously rich—it is to get my money. Spare no expense. If it costs thousands I can repay it."

Farleigh felt a shudder run through him, and the lines in his face deepened as Range went on—

"Go to the police—to a magistrate! You see I am treated as if I were mad!"

"Pray end this, Mr. Farleigh," said Shelldrake, plucking him by the sleeve.

"Let me hear all he has to say, sir," replied the visitor.

"Yes; for pity's sake—for heaven's sake, hear me out!" cried Range, his manner growing more and more excited as he read in the

young clergyman's face that his words were not having the right effect.

"You see the mischief you are doing," whispered Sheldrake. "Five minutes of this will undo six months of our toil."

"Don't listen to him!" cried Range, hoarsely. "You see I am weak and broken by their ill-usage. I tell you I am not mad!"

"Pray, pray be calm! I will listen to you," said Farleigh.

"Yes—yes! pray listen!" cried Range. "Not mad—but starved—my broken arm—use money—my great wealth!"

Sheldrake gave the visitor a meaning glance, which he caught, and the strangeness of the appeal shook his faith again.

"To Miss Nesbitt," continued Range, whose words grew more broken, his speech less coherent; for the delirium consequent upon his injury and the excitement were upon the increase, and, added to his shaved head and surroundings, gave intense colour to the words of Sheldrake spoken below.

"Yes, yes!" said Farleigh, quickly. "I am your friend; I will help you; but you must be calm—this excitement—this——"

Range drew back from him, holding him at arm's length, and stared at him wildly, fighting the while with the cloud that was enveloping his brain.

He mastered it, and for the moment spoke firmly and clearly.

"Help me!" he cried, passionately; and he darted a savage, despairing look of hate at Sheldrake, who stood there apparently troubled and wrinkled of brow, but watchful as a cat, as he saw that matters were working for his end.

"Yes, yes! I tell you I am your friend, and I will."

"I helped you," cried Range. "I can see—I saved you when—you know—you know—the bridge—the water—that morning! Help me now—from these men—from these devils—who are——"

"Be calm, be calm!" whispered Farleigh, who was suffering under intense emotion.

Range forced him back, staring at him wildly; and then, loosing his hold, he threw up his hand and literally shrieked—

"Heavens! and he, too, thinks me mad!"

"You see what you are doing," whispered Sheldrake, in an imploring voice.

Range lost the hold he had fought to keep upon himself, and the cloud came down. His eyes were bloodshot and wild, his voice hoarse, and his words incoherent as he struggled up fiercely now and made a horrible effort to use his broken arm.

"Fiends! demons!" he shrieked. "Help—help! You—you—help—help! Do you not see—mad—they say I'm mad—help!"

"You must hold him, my dear Jack," said Sheldrake, with a sob, and the tears streamed down his cheeks. "Call Parkins up! Mr. Farleigh, as a Christian man, I implore you! I did wrong to bring you here."

Farleigh's hands were clasped, and he stood staring helplessly from one to the other; then, with a piteous sigh, he followed

Sheldrake to the door as Range fell back, with closed eyes, insensible upon the pillow, John Pannell's strong hands being needless to keep him quiet now.

"It was a mistake," said Sheldrake, as they descended the stairs. "Parkins, go up directly!" he called over the balustrade. "He has had another fit."

"I was afraid of it," said Mewburn, as he passed them hurriedly; and he shook his head and tightened his lips.

"I thought after last night's trouble he would have been calm," sighed Sheldrake, with a piteous look at his visitor, as they stood once more in the dining-room.

Farleigh was half stunned.

"You met the poor boy, then, in London!" said Sheldrake.

"Yes, yes!" said Farleigh, hastily.

"We were weeks hunting for him. He escaped us, and went down in the country and annoyed some lady, I believe. Then he returned to town, and we found he had been to our agent, and he let him have a hundred pounds for me, as he thought."

Sheldrake watched his visitor cautiously, to see if he had mentioned a large enough sum, and then, satisfied that he was on the right track, he continued: "When we found him he had not a shilling, and he had run up a heavy bill at the place where he had been staying. Poor lad! poor lad!"

Sheldrake sank upon a couch and covered his face with his hands.

Farleigh stood looking down upon him as he sat there; his shoulders were heaving with suppressed emotion—a brother minister suffering terrible mental anguish.

The young clergyman was drawn in two ways. At first, on seeing Range, he had felt that he was the victim of these men. Then the poor fellow had so repeated the artful suggestion of his gaolers that the first shock changed his visitor's belief. The delirious wanderings, the wild cries, the evident disorder of his mind, endorsed it, and Farleigh's heart sank, for now even Range's manly, charitable act told against him.

"Would a sane man have placed twenty pounds in the hands of such a lost, besotted castaway as I was then?"

He stood thinking and gazing down at Sheldrake for some moments.

"You must forgive me, Mr. Range, if I have seemed suspicious. I ask your pardon."

Sheldrake bent his head lower.

"You will let me come and see my poor friend again?"

"Yes. Come—pray come," murmured Sheldrake sadly, but without raising his face. "He will be better soon. When he is calm he will be glad to see you."

"Thank you!" said Farleigh, huskily. "He did me such a vital service that my heart goes forth to him as a brother. Good-bye!" he continued, laying his hand softly on the scoundrel's shoulder;

"Heaven help you in your affliction—Heaven help him and give him back his clouded reason!"

Sheldrake made a motion as if to rise.

"No, no," said Farleigh, softly; "I can find my way out. There; I will ring. You need not stir. Believe me, this terrible trouble will be respected by me, and that I shall use my best efforts to hush all scandalous talk about my friend."

Sheldrake bowed lower, and, in a broken voice, muttered a few thanks, but showing a fiercely vindictive countenance as he watched the departing visitor, when Jane opened and closed the gate.

"A confounded idiotic fool!" he muttered. "Ha! ha! ha! Sarah," he continued, as the woman entered the room, "cry 'mad dog!' and how the people run!"

"You are going too far with him!" cried Sarah, fiercely.

"What, with that parson?"

"No; with Arthur Range. He is raving up there."

"Not he. You mind your own business."

"It is my business!" she cried, fiercely.

"No: it is mine. You wait for your share of the spoil."

"I tell you," she cried, "that if any harm happens to that poor fellow upstairs——"

"Stop; listen to me," he said, catching her by the wrist, and holding it firmly down. "You hear, see, and say nothing. I've got enough to do to work this game without the meddling of a woman. Look here, Sarah, my handsome virago, interfere with me in the least and Jack shall know that you really love this fool; and, if he once realises it, I wouldn't give much for such a life as yours."

"You miserable coward!"

"Am I?" he said, sneeringly. "Hark here, beauty: you hate me!"

"Bitterly!" she said, with a forced laugh.

"Jack loves you—like an elephant that he is—and if he thought you were false he'd behave like one—he'd beat you down and trample you to death."

"You never told me that when you tried to get me to listen to you," she retorted.

"Never mind about that," said Sheldrake. "I only warn you once more: you interfere with me in my plans, or meddle about that milksop, and Jack Pannell knows everything that I keep a secret—there!"

"And now look here," said Sarah, with her handsome eyes flashing. "Jack will believe me before he believes you, and, if you make bad blood between us, I'll——"

"Well, what?"

"Never mind; but listen to me, Frank Sheldrake, you'll never see Dixey's Land again."

At that moment Mewburn and Pannell entered, both looking very serious.

"The game's up," said the former excitedly. "All this money thrown away! What are we going to do—get off at once?"

"To do? Get off? Why, what are you thinking about, Nathan? There's no money wasted."

"But the whole affair will be the talk of the neighbourhood."

"Let the neighbourhood talk. We are right enough, my dear boy. The parson has gone away believing it all, and sympathising with me. He is coming again."

"But you won't let him?"

"I don't know—perhaps—we shall see. But how did Range get that file?"

"From that butcher fellow. He's been prowling about here for days. I've seen him," said Pannell.

"You don't think that girl had anything to do with it?" said Sheldrake, sharply.

"No," replied Pannell; "she is too stupid! Next time I see him I'll send the dogs outside the wall."

"It's this parson we have to fear," said Sheldrake. "He may prove troublesome, but not till after he has been again. He is off the scent now, and we have nothing to mind; only it is time Range was screwed up. He must pay. We have waited long enough."

"But," said Mewburn, "I know you are wrong. At any moment we may have his friends down upon us in search of the missing man. You would use his name."

"I know what I am doing," said Sheldrake sharply. "He is not a missing man. He is over here for a trip, and he has no friends but that razor-faced old Yank."

"Ah, yes! we shall have mischief with him if he takes up the hunt."

"He has not taken up the hunt," said Sheldrake, coolly. "Now just go on, please, as if nothing had happened. I think you fellows might have a little confidence in me by now."

"Yes, yes!" said Mewburn, biting his nails; "but that parson——"

"Is off the scent, I tell you. There: that will do."

The Reverend Frederick Farleigh certainly was off the scent for a time; but the time was short.

He walked sadly back to his apartments, shocked at the turn things had taken, and ready to believe that Range was indeed mad.

He ran over in review all that he could recall in respect of his conduct and words, and, for a time, his heart sank as he thought of the sudden display of generosity—that act which had stayed the thinker just as he was sliding away, and had enabled him to check himself ready for the turn in his fortunes which had, after much waiting, placed him in a position of trust, with the past seeming like a dream.

"It is too plain," he said; "the poor fellow has these terrible fits. It was horrible!"

He shuddered, and, for the rest of the day, went about heart-sick; and feeling as if a terrible load was upon his brain.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

WOOLING UPSIDE DOWN.

THE days glided on as they glide even with those who suffer most, and Range's fever, with the accompanying delirium, rapidly abated.

His arm knit together healthily and well, and after two or three attempts to gain the doctor's sympathy when he called, and to get him to see that there was no insanity in the patient, Range gave it up as a hopeless case, and sullenly submitted to his presence when he came.

"One would think that a medical man or a surgeon could at once detect a man's state," argued Range, as he sat at his window with his arm in a sling, his principal amusements being a Pyramus and Thisbe chat with Jane through the wall, the watching of the brick-makers beginning their annual attack upon the clay, and the progress of his birds.

His trifling with the birds took him back to Brackley, and the happy days he had passed in the society of Judith Nesbitt.

"If it were not for these things they would drive me mad," he said to himself. "They would like to make me imbecile so that I should give way and sign what they asked; but never! I'll keep myself sane in spite of them."

Jane was always ready to give him pins after he had taken a solemn oath she dictated that he would not do anything with them to his "juggler" vein.

This was one morning when he was rapidly getting the better of the injury to his arm, and the girl was busy in the room.

"What, do you think I want to kill myself?" he said.

Jane nodded.

"I've heerd as mad people do sich things," she said, standing by the bedside leaning upon her broom, and gazing down at him contemplatively. "How lovely your hair is coming again about the ears!"

"Nonsense! Jane; and I'm not mad. How many times am I to tell you?"

"Ah! but you are, sir; you don't know how you go on sometimes. There's four pins I've stuck in the mattress where you can find 'em."

Range stared at her in a horrified way, doubting himself, and wondering whether there were times when his long confinement made him lose his self-control.

"Yes, sir, that's just how you look then," continued Jane; "but," she said, with a weak laugh, and undulating from top to toe as she rubbed her right ear on her shoulder, "I shouldn't mind. I know you wouldn't hurt me."

"Hurt you, no; of course not," said Range, uneasily.

"I hope they won't cut off your lovely hair again," said Jane, with a sigh.

"I wish you'd leave my lovely hair alone," cried Range, gruffly. Then, sharply, and angry with himself the while for making friends with this girl, but excusing himself on the plea that he must talk to some one, he exclaimed, "Well, when are you going to marry Isaac?"

"Never!" cried Jane, with a thump of the broom on the floor. "I'm not going to marry him."

She simpered again, and stood staring at the prisoner.

"I say, Mrs. Range is 'orrid jealous of me."

"Is she?"

"Yes; she's always watching me, and I know she'd send me away, only she's afraid I should talk. She's a 'orrid wicked woman, that she is, and if she comes up here again to watch you I shall tell her of it. I won't have it! It's a shame!"

"Why, what do you mean?" cried Range, sharply.

"Oh! you know," simpered the poor girl. "I say, I said I wouldn't help you to get away."

"Yes—you did!" cried Range, panting.

"Stop a moment," whispered Jane; "let's see if any of the cats is watching. No; it's all right," she continued, after an inspection.

"I never see such a lot as they are!"

"Yes, go on," said Range; "you said that you wouldn't help me to escape. Will you now?"

"I dunno. It wouldn't be right."

"Yes, yes! it would. Jane, my good, dear girl, for Heaven's sake help me."

"Go on," said Jane, smiling. "I like to hear you talk like that."

"Talk like what?"

"Like that, you know. It's nice."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do. Go on."

"Will you help me to escape?"

"I—I think perhaps I would now."

"Will you take a letter to that clergyman, then?"

Jane looked down, then round the room, and then tittered.

"Oh! I don't know," she whispered, with a soft, silly laugh.

"You shouldn't!"

Range was too much excited to notice her ways in his thoughts of escape.

"Write to him, then, for me, and tell him I am not mad. Oh! my dear, good girl, I can't take your hands and thank you."

"No; but I can touch yours," said Jane, softly, "only I don't like to."

"Take one and press it, for that's a compact between us, Jane. I'll make you such a rich woman when I get away."

"I don't mind about being rich," she simpered. "There! I won't write. I'll go and tell that Mr. Farleigh myself, and tell him to be ready when I get you away."

"Yes, yes; but you must get me some clothes."

"I've got nine poun' five saved up," said Jane, whose face was scarlet with delight. "I'll buy you a new suit and a new hat."

"No, no, my dear girl!" cried Range. "Find out where they have put my clothes, and bring me them. I'll let down the string at night, and you can tie it to the bundle."

"I know where they keep 'em," said Jane eagerly.

"Better and better."

"But—but—if I do get you away, and go with you to the clergyman—you—you won't be mad—and hurt me?"

"Hurt you?" he said. "No, nor shall any one else."

"Isaac will be fine and vexed," said Jane, laughing, "but I don't care."

"No; he can't do anything to help me."

"Of course he can't," said Jane. "Oh, I say, how savage they'll be!"

"Yes, let them be savage," said Range, whose heart throbbed with delight.

"It do make you look so handsome!" said Jane; and then, running once more to the door, she listened, and came back.

"I wouldn't do this, only you can't," she whispered with her face scarlet. "It isn't proper for me to do."

"No one will blame you for helping and taking pity on a poor fellow like me, Jane; and never mind what people say, I'll take care of and protect you as long as you live."

"I don't quite like to," said Jane, hanging her head; "it ain't right."

"It is right, I tell you, it is right!" cried Range.

"Then I will," cried Jane, letting her broom fall against a chair; and, stooping over him, she kissed him twice quickly on the cheek, and started back with her face aflame.

"Jane!" roared Range. "How dare you!"

"Why you said I might," she said half laughing and hanging her head bashfully.

"Said you might?"

"Yes; and we're going to be married as soon as I get you away."

"What have I been saying to the girl?" groaned Range. Then aloud, "You foolish girl! What nonsense!"

"Why you said I was to go and see the clergyman about it."

"About getting me out of this cursed prison, you madwoman! You mistake me."

"I don't!" cried Jane, stamping her foot and ready to sob.

"You've always been making love to me, though you were mad."

"I've not!" cried Range excitedly. "You mistake."

"I haven't!" cried the girl, flaming up angrily. "You've always been courting me and talking to me through the wall."

"As any one else would talk to you, my poor girl!"

"Oh, no, you haven't!" said Jane softly. "Nobody else never talked to me as you have, and I'd go through anything for you, even if you are mad."

"But, my dear girl, you mistake me."

"Oh, no, I don't!" said Jane. "Didn't you ask me for a lock of my hair?"

"Oh, what nonsense!"

"You say so now because you've got a fit come on, and you forget," sighed Jane. "But I'm going to wait, and when you say we'll go off together and get married proper, I'll get you your things and take you away."

Range's brow grew corrugated, and he lay watching the girl in hopeless perplexity, as she hurriedly finished her task, while he tried to arrange his thoughts so as to speak gently, kindly, and convincingly to the poor simple-hearted girl about her mistake.

But the opportunity did not come, for steps were heard, and Jane said hastily,

"Hush! here's some one coming. I don't mind your speaking unkind to me. I know what you mean when you're better, and I'm going to wait."

Then Mewburn entered with Pannell, and, as soon as the girl had gone, there was a long and stormy scene, a repetition of many others, and Range felt that he had Pannell to thank for saving him from violence, the great, bluff fellow interfering, and at last forcing Mewburn away, but not before he had stung Range into a sharp reply.

"I tell you one thing," cried Mewburn, "if you don't soon come to terms I'll kill you."

"Thank you," said Range coolly. "I only stipulate for a decent funeral, I'll give you the funds for that."

"What, do you want to die?" said Pannell curiously.

"No," said Range; "but I'd pay the forfeit of my life for the sake of knowing that your miserable, contemptible scoundrel of a companion would be hanged for my murder."

Mewburn came at him furiously, but Pannell held him back.

"Don't hit him, Nathan, for speaking the truth," chuckled Pannell.

"Ha! ha! ha! he had you there."

"The poor brute's half mad!" said Mewburn with a sneer.

"Perhaps so," said Range, who found Pannell's good-humoured smile contagious; "but you won't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

"Curse you!" began Mewburn; but a great hand gripped him by the shoulder.

"That'll do!" cried Pannell. "Come away," and Range heard him continue, as they were passing out, "Shell wouldn't have that."

"Shell and you are a pair of fools, wasting money in expense. If I had him to myself for twenty-four hours the business would be done."

"I'm rather weak," thought Range, as the door closed, "but I feel as if I should like to pass those four-and-twenty hours alone with that miserable, sordid scoundrel. I don't think he'd win. I could forgive John Pannell, and not be so very hard on that clever snake,

Sheldrake, but I could kill Nathan Mewburn with all the pleasure that one feels in destroying some noxious beast.

"Pah! I'm getting out of myself again," he muttered. "This excitement tells upon a man. Let's have a look at Judith and the captain, and see how their housekeeping is getting on."

He moved towards the window, after a walk up and down, and then stopped.

"Poor lass!" he muttered. "I never thought she was taking it like that. Oh! it is too absurd. My lovely hair!"

He walked to the glass and looked in, to burst into a fit of bitter laughter at his grotesque, Pierrot-like aspect.

The laugh ended with a fierce stamp of the foot, and he ground his teeth with rage.

"Why doesn't that Farleigh do something?" he cried bitterly. "Oh, that a man should be so helpless when he is branded with such a mark as this! If I don't do something I shall go mad indeed!"

CHAPTER LXXX.

LADY FANSHAW MAKES A PROMISE.

CARLEIGH parted from Sir Harry directly, and, restless and excited, went into the billiard-room and took up a cue, to begin knocking the balls about, with his mind at work trying to find some escape from the peril that was hemming him in.

He was planning out his course, and asking himself whether it would not be better to escape at once; but he felt that he could not do that, and leave the witness of his deed behind to betray all.

"They'd hunt me down in a week," he said; "and, though it would be brought in manslaughter, my position would be gone."

He was interrupted in his musings by the rustling of a silk dress, and Lady Fanshaw entered the room, thin, pale, and careworn.

"I have been looking for you everywhere," she said hastily, and her voice trembled as she spoke.

"And now you have found me, O mine enemy!" he exclaimed, bitterly.

"Enemy?"

"What do you mean, then? Do you come as friend?"

"I come to try and save you—to implore you to escape before it is too late."

"And you will go with me?" he said, his whole manner changing.

"At last, then! Oh, Alice, how I have waited for this!"

"Are you mad?" she exclaimed. "You know that to-morrow the wood will be searched. Judith has told me all—told me what has been burning into my brain through these weary months. Everything will be discovered, and then it will be too late."

"Then go with me to-night."

"I came to talk to you of yourself," she said coldly; "to bid you escape for your life, for I must tell Sir Harry all."

"You must not tell him a word," he hissed. "Let them discover what they like. Who is to prove that I did it?"

"I shall," she said calmly. "I owe it to my husband to make this late reparation for my wrong. My illness and the prostration weakened me and kept me silent, and I went on hoping always that you would leave this place and hide in some foreign land."

"Hide!" he cried bitterly. "Where? There is no road open to the sun or moon. This world throbs everywhere with tale-bearing nerves. Hide? Why, the world has grown too small! The blood-hounds of the law know every spot by heart. No, my dear: without you there would be no hiding-place for me! I must choose between social death and punishment if I wish to escape."

"Go, George, at once—this evening—while there is time. Tomorrow the discovery will be made, and I shall have told all."

"You will tell nothing," he said grimly. "I would sooner kill you than you should speak."

"Is not one crime enough upon your soul?" she said calmly. "I should not resist; I have nothing to live for now. But he would know; I should tell him first."

He gazed in her eyes and read his peril in their cold, unflinching determination, and his plan was conceived.

"You are right," he said; "I will go."

"Yes—to-night," she said. "I could not bear for you to be seized for this crime."

"Then you do love me a little," he sneered.

"I love my husband, and I would spare him the agony of seeing the boy and man he worshipped treated as a common murderer."

"Yes," he said thoughtfully; "the game is up. I must go."

"And to-night—at once—before it is too late."

"No," he said; "I could not go yet."

"But to-morrow the discovery will be made."

"What of that?" he cried. "The discovery does not bring it home to me, unless you denounce me as you propose."

"I denounce you!"

"Yes, by confessing to Sir Harry!"

"I must confess. I shall tell him all."

"To-night?"

She hesitated.

"You must wait till Friday—a good day for a confession," he said firmly. "This is Tuesday. It will give me time to get away. I must have a few hours' law."

"But to-morrow's horrors! Think of them."

"Let to-morrow's horrors take care of themselves. Perhaps it will be a week before the discovery is made. Promise me that you will wait till Friday. Then confess what you will; I shall be safe."

"You swear that you will leave here if I wait till then?"

"I swear," he said coldly. "There! are you satisfied? It is time this weary play was at an end."

"Yes," she cried; "I am satisfied." And she turned to go.

"Stop!" he said hoarsely. "We shall never meet again. You know how I have loved you."

"Silence!" she cried sternly; and he saw her face assume its former look of loathing.

"No, I will not be silent," he said, in a low, deep voice. "I know now that you do not love me, that you never did; and I have this knowledge for my recompense, that I killed that man to save your reputation."

"What more do you wish to say?" she said, coldly.

"I say I am going to see you no more; but I must have one memory of the past as some slight solace when I am far away. Will you grant my last wish?"

"What is it?" she said.

"Write me these words, and give me to-morrow or next day, when you will—*Forgive me*, and put your initials there. I shall not speak to you again before I go save in the presence of others. You will do this?"

"I will," she said coldly, and she left the room.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

AN EXCITING WATCH.

THERE was no gathering at dinner at the Priory that night. Sir Harry partook of something in the boudoir with Lady Fanshaw. Judith declined hers; Carleigh did not make his appearance; and Sir Robert and the American visitor had the dining-room to themselves, to sit talking and smoking afterwards and thinking over their plans.

"Come to my door about half-past eleven," said Sir Robert, "and I'll show you the best way. There will be nothing done before then."

"We had better go sooner," said Uncle Wash.

"I think not," said Sir Robert. "Depend upon it that will be ample time."

Uncle Wash allowed himself to be overruled; for he did not see much likelihood of steps being taken before midnight, even if anything were done at all.

It was close upon half-past eleven when the old man opened his bedroom door, his chamber being the one that his nephew had occupied; and on looking out cautiously upon the dark corridor he found all silent.

He had to go to the end of the passage to reach Sir Robert's room, and he was hesitating, because it wanted five minutes of the time, when he heard the next door to his own open softly, and some one passed closely by him, whom, with his well-trained senses, he recognised as Carleigh, by a peculiar hissing way with which he drew his breath.

He went to the end opposite to that where Sir Robert slept; and

as Uncle Wash listened he heard a door-handle turned softly, when there was a momentary glow of light as from an expiring fire, and then the door closed.

"What room's that, I wonder," he said to himself; "and what's he doing there?" for he had not Milly's knowledge of the place to enable him to tell that Carleigh had entered Lady Fanshaw's boudoir, where he softly lit a wax taper and busied himself for a moment by the writing-case before going back to his room, where he locked himself in and sat down by the open window.

He did not pass Uncle Wash on his return, though; for after waiting a few moments till his time was up the old American went to Sir Robert's room, and together they descended the stairs and passed out through the conservatory and down to the Wilderness, where, in obedience to the visitor's wish, Sir Robert sat down with him on the rough seat by the landslip that Sir Harry had had made.

It was intensely dark—a couple of hours before moonrise, and not a star visible, so that where they sat, beneath a holm-oak whose leafage was evergreen and dense, they were in complete concealment, unless any one came close up and peered closely into the deep hollow.

Not ten yards away was the mass of stone and earth, with the water rippling and gurgling about the foot; and in the silence and darkness the fall and rush of the water made the place seem full of whisperings, which were broken now and then by a splash.

Half-a-dozen times over Sir Robert pressed his companion's arm, feeling sure that he heard steps; but for a long while Uncle Wash did not move.

At last, when all seemed perfectly still, the old man laid his great hand on Sir Robert's; but it was a long time before the old General heard the rustling of some one coming; for he had not the keen senses of a man who had had to be always on the watch to save his life.

Finally, though, he heard the rustling plainly, and as he listened he made out that some one came from far away in the woods and stopped opposite to them on the other side of the stream.

A slight pressure of the hand passed between the two listeners; for it was too dark to watch, and they remained there almost breathless as they heard the person who had come rustling and moving about among the bushes before them. Once or twice a stone or two rattled down and fell with a plash in the stream, and then the rustling continued, as if some one were searching about eagerly.

All at once the sound ceased, whoever it was in front remaining perfectly still; and the reason was soon made plain, for a fresh rustling noise was heard from the listeners' right, as if another were on his way from the house.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

WHAT UNCLE WASH HEARD.

THE sound came nearer, a soft rustling noise of boots thrusting aside the bushes and last autumn's leaves. This went on, and Sir Robert and his companion, though they could see nothing, plainly realised that this second comer was about to join the first.

Uncle Wash's breath came fast, and he would have liked to whisper his suspicions to Sir Robert; but so still was everything that his voice he felt would be assuredly heard above the rushing, silvery noise of the waters, and he remained there listening as intently as when in bygone days he had waited for Indian sign.

The rustling continued, passing right on till it was evident that the two, whoever they were, must be in close proximity.

The silence was intensely painful now, for all at once the rustling made by the second comer stopped; then a loud expiration of breath was heard, and lastly a suppressed cry, which indicated surprise, and that those in front were not friends.

"Who's this?" said a voice familiar to both the listeners. "Sam Burton?"

"Yes," was the gruff answer.

"What are you doing here, sir?"

"I mun see to my work, cap'en. What are you doing here?"

"You villain! You are watching me," cried Carleigh in a voice full of suppressed anger.

"Nay, I never watched you, sir. It's my duty to be down here."

There was a dead pause, and then Carleigh said, in a low voice,

"Do you want money, Sam?"

"Nay, sir, I'm reight enew for that."

And then silence.

"What are you going to do to-morrow, Sam?"

"What Sir Harry bids me."

"You know what I mean. What are you going to do?"

"Shall I tell thee what I'd like to do, sir?"

"Yes."

"Up and tell the whole truth about the lungeing coward as shot me, and then shot my poor dog."

"I don't understand you, man."

"Nay, but thou dost, and thou'd straangely like to send a bullet through my head to-night, only thou knows thou'st enew to do to-morrow to faace it out about him as is lying ther."

"What?"

"Ah! it's too laate, cap'en, to talk that way. Thou knows I've had it on my mind ever since, and asked myself whether I should tell Sir Harry, but wouldn't say what would break the heart of the best master as ever lived."

"It was an accident, Sam; I swear it was an accident."

"Ay! And weer it an accident when thou shot me and then my

poor Bess? If I was thou, sir, I'd put the seas between me and that 'Merican gent before to-morrow's gone, for he's scented it all out as sure as sure."

"But you, Sam?"

"Me, sir? I shall hold by what I said if I die for it."

"You're a good, faithful fellow, Sam. I will give you a hundred pounds on the day of your marriage."

"I don't want to foul my wedding wi' blood-money, sir; and if I keep silence to-morrow about all I know it's so as the best master in the world shan't hear that it was you as killed him as lies here and tried to make my lady listen to your love."

There was a loud hiss as if of anger, and then Sam went on sharply,

"Drop that hand, or by Him as made me I'll fire!"

There was the sharp click of a gun-lock heard, and then, after a terrible silence, Carleigh spoke again.

"You shouldn't have angered me by saying that. There! it is past; we must not quarrel. Now tell me, Sam, what can we do?"

"Do?"

"Yes, do, man. Is there any means of hiding this or drawing them off the scent?"

"Nay, sir, no way. I coom down to-night to see if happen I might be able to do owt, but it's impossible; it must come out."

There was a low gasp plainly heard, and then Carleigh exclaimed,

"You will not betray me?"

"Nay, you may feel sure o' that, sir. I shall say nowt."

"No matter what is said?"

"No matter what is said, sir, it's safe wi' me."

"Then I don't care," cried Carleigh quickly.

"Thou'lt go away then, sir?"

"Go? No, I shall be here to-morrow, and the American may find out what he likes."

"And if they bring it home to thee, sir?" whispered Burton.

"Let them, if they can," said Carleigh scornfully. "If they do, I did it to save my own life; but unless you betray me I am safe."

As Carleigh whispered the words about saving his own life, Uncle Wash laid his hand upon his companion's breast.

"And you mean to be here to-morrow, sir?" whispered Sam Burton in a low, excited voice.

"I mean to be here to-morrow. Let them find it. There is nothing to identify me with the matter."

As he spoke a pang shot through him, for he recalled the state in which he had returned to his room that night.

The next moment he thought of the time and months of lying in the moist earth, and he took hope.

"Then you will coom?" said Sam Burton broadly.

"Yes, I shall come."

The voices ceased. The rustling began again, going off to the right, and died away; and, as it did, a fresh rustling commenced, and was continued up the side of the gully, and finally it too ceased.

For the space of quite an hour the two listeners remained; and then, satisfied that no attempt was to be made to throw them off the scent, they also returned silently to the house, and to Sir Robert's room, where they sat talking for some time before parting in the early morn of an eventful day.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE LAST ENVELOPE.

THAT night Lady Fanshaw had only been able to conceal her agony of mind by pleading illness and lying down, with Sir Harry, who was also, beneath a calm demeanour, terribly excited, keeping watch beside her bed.

And as she lay there with her face covered she saw the whole scene as of old, and asked herself how it would be possible for her to exist, knowing what would be going on next morning in the woods.

It was only the memory of the agonies through which she had already passed that gave her strength; and joined to that was the thought that on the Friday she would confess all to her husband, and be at rest.

Then came the thought of Judith, and the discovery that must be made. How could she look her in the face again—that face that would be so terribly changed? It seemed more than she could bear!

Sir Harry rose from his chair by her side, and leant over her.

"Asleep!" he said softly with a painful sigh, and in his misery he left the room with a light tread to seek his own, there to sit and think of how he could keep the horrors of the next day from his wife's knowledge.

"It would half kill her in her delicate state," he said; and he bitterly repented his promise, till he grew calmer, and felt that it was inevitable, and the search must be made.

Lady Fanshaw had not been left alone many minutes before she rose and went into the boudoir to seat herself at the writing-table, with its stationery-stand before her.

Taking up a sheet of note-paper, she wrote the words Carleigh had desired—

"I forgive you!"

But she did not sign to them her name, and, after sitting gazing at them for a few minutes, she tore the paper into the smallest fragments, and threw them into the Chinese basket at her side.

Then she repented of her act, and, thoughtfully taking a fresh sheet, she wrote the words again, to sit looking at them for some minutes in a weak, dazed manner, as if she hardly comprehended what she did.

Raising her eyes, she gazed vacantly round the handsomely-furnished room, whose ornamentation was her husband's special compliment to her on their marriage.

"No!" she cried, fiercely; "I will wait; but I cannot do this thing."

Once more the paper was torn into tiny fragments; and as they fell in a shower in the basket there was a reaction.

"I might forgive him—even him whom I loathe—as I hope to be forgiven," she said, softly.

Bending forward she took a fresh sheet, dashed the words down, under the excitement of the moment; then, with the paper in her hand, stopped short.

"No; it is for my husband to say those words when he knows all."

She tore the paper up once more, and the scraps were falling from her attenuated hands, when Judith, who had been unable to remain passive in her own room, stole in to make sure that her cousin knew nothing about the search that was to take place.

Their eyes met in a strange, inquiring look; and then Judith caught at something to say to put an end to the terrible restraint under which she felt herself.

"Oh, Alice!" she cried; "writing letters, when you know how likely it is to make you ill again!"

Lady Fanshaw smiled faintly, but did not speak.

"Let me write for you, dear! You have been trying, I see, and have torn up your letter."

"Yes," said Lady Fanshaw, with a strange shiver.

"There, lie down, dear!" continued Judith, tenderly, "and let me be your amanuensis."

"It does not matter."

"But it does!" said Judith, helping her cousin to the couch, whose pillow she arranged; and then, after bending down and kissing her, she returned to the writing-table.

"There!" she said, assuming a merriment she did not feel—"to whom shall I write first?"

"First?" said Lady Fanshaw, wearily, trying to think of some one to whom a message might be sent—"to—to—send a line to Dr. Murray, asking him to call if he is in this direction to-morrow."

"You are not worse, dear?" said Judith, eagerly.

"Oh, no!" said Lady Fanshaw, in a whisper; "I feel calmer and better now—better than I have felt for months. Judith, love, I can seem to see the end of this weary fever, and I shall be better soon."

"That is not true," said Judith to herself, as she noted her cousin's feverish excitement; and, with a feeling of satisfaction that it was the right thing to send this note, she carefully indited a few lines, and added a postscript, praying that the doctor would make a point of calling, and not defer his visit till he was coming by.

"There," cried Judith, glad of the opportunity to talk of some indifferent matter, and to lull the fever in her own brain—"there, dear! will that do?" and she read the note, omitting the postscript.

"Yes, that will do," said Lady Fanshaw, dreamily.

"That's well," continued Judith. "Why, you've only one enve-

lope let;" and she took the one little delicate-looking folding of paper from the stationery-case.

"I—I have been writing a good deal!" said Lady Fanshaw, wearily; and she gazed through her half-closed eyes at the pale, excited-looking girl, in whose cheeks two fever-spots were burning, plainly seen as the shaded lamp threw its light full upon her soft, sweet face.

It was a picture worth looking at; but no one could have gazed at it for a moment without feeling that she who was seated there was suffering from some terrible excitement which she was trying to repress, as she held the folded note-paper in one hand, the envelope in the other.

Only a simple, innocent-looking envelope; but, when the others were removed from the stationery-case, George Carleigh had handled it for a few minutes just after his last interview with Lady Fanshaw.

He had handled that very envelope, having a small, stoppered bottle and a camel's-hair pencil ready for the application he had made.

Later on that night, when he stole into the boudoir for a few moments, it was to draw his breath in the peculiar hissing manner become habitual to him when suffering under any strong emotion, for he saw light—freedom from a charge that he knew must bring down destruction upon his head.

He could face the murder charge if he were suspected, and Sam Burton spoke out; but he was haunted by the face of Sir Harry, fierce, implacable, and asking him ever—what of his return for all that his guardian had done?

This time the application to the gummed envelope was intense in strength. Lady Fanshaw would have her third seizure, and fits were sometimes fatal on the third attack.

At any moment there might be an alarm; but he could not stay now, for there was a magnetic influence down in the Wilderness that drew him there that night, and he felt that he must go.

One more look at the stationery case upon the writing-table.

Yes; the last envelope was gone!

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THOUGHTS IN PRISON.

JUVITH and the captain had made a match of it—the latter never having displayed the slightest resentment at the pecks he had received in the back, nor on account of the feathers he had lost. He seemed to believe that they would all come back again; and certainly he was a handsome bird, and very proud of his little soft grey mate, as they chirped about the window-sill, coming now regularly for their crumbs and scraps of meat.

Arthur Lincoln Range, the more soberly-tinted cock-sparrow, on

the other hand, seemed to mope and grow dejected, and his plumage became less bright ; and he and Uncle Wash devoted their attention to the ample supply of food, and watched the progress of the young couple.

It was childish work : but as Range sat and watched the birds, and petted and fed them, his face grew brighter and his eyes more clear. At times he felt sad and bitter, as he thought of Elmthorpe and those after whom he had named the birds ; but the sadness, like the pleasure, was wholesome, and the present task took up his attention when he was in real danger of going melancholy mad.

The captain now grew very tame—not half so tame as Judith, who would come from anywhere within hearing at Range's chirping call.

They afforded him endless amusement, and he used to tell himself that now his last hope was gone he must be friends with the captain for Judith's sake.

So the captain obtained as much favour as his little bride, while Arthur Range was pitied, and Uncle Wash came in for a friendly crumb.

There was plenty to see : now the captain came fluttering up with straw ; now it was Judith with a strand of dry grass, or a bit of bast left by John Pannell in the garden, and put within arm's reach in a convenient spot in the ivy ; for the nest-building went on at early morning especially, the birds coming at intervals to feed, watching the giver of the crumbs, and chirping their satisfaction.

Then came a morning when on passing his fingers through the round hole in the side of the roughly-woven egg-shaped nest, Range could feel an egg—Judith's first egg—which, on being carefully lifted out by means of a teaspoon, proved to be prettily splashed and marked with black.

Then, as the days passed, there were others, till six lay in the feathery bed, and then there was the watching for the commencement of the hatching.

It soon began, the patient little bird sitting hour after hour, and without resenting the cautiously introduced fingers which softly stroked her head.

Range had made up his mind that once the captain was married he would neglect and ill-use his wife ; but, to what he called his chagrin, Range found that the young husband was patience and attention personified. He fed his young wife with religious care. Far from engaging in flirtations with other hens, he devoted himself assiduously to his own, and sang from the top of the cornice over his nest for the delectation of his spouse. It was not much of a song, being principally a lay in a cheerful key sometimes about *chips* and *cheese*, with a chorus at the end of every line, which consisted in a repetition of the word *Chiswick* ; but, trivial as it may seem, the moments when he was studying the habits of these birds and listening to their notes were the most bearable that the prisoner passed, and formed the business of his day.

"I'm growing childish," he used to say ; "but it keeps my head clear." This would be when he was practising with a dart, formed of a scrap of paper, a bit of firewood, and one of Jane's pins.

Another time he rolled up bread into bullets to shoot through a tube of paper ; tried to carve figures on pieces of bone, essayed to amuse himself just as a child might have tried if shut up in such a room ; and these trifling games and the study of garden and brick-field kept him safe, when but for them his agony of mind would have driven him into fits of fury of a disastrous kind.

His efforts to exercise himself were incessant. He would work over some laborious feat in walking, bounding a number of times over his bed, or holding out chairs with his uninjured arm, till he was utterly exhausted ; but these efforts brought him relief.

"They keep me sane," he said, with a smile, "and make me strong for the struggle I shall have some day with that scoundrel Sheldrake."

Every day he forced himself during that spring weather to throw off the morbid lethargy into which he would have sunk by doing something.

For the most part these things were extremely puerile ; but they served their turn. A pin served him for pencil, and in one corner of the room he employed himself making fancy sketches of his enemies that were not at all of a complimentary nature.

Another day he began a poem, but it shaped itself into a pæan of praise of Judith, and he carefully scraped off the words he had scratched as being too sacred to be left there.

But those sparrows were his greatest resource, and on the day when Judith, in a burst of eagerness for food, settled upon his hand to take the crumbs he had ready, his delight knew no bounds.

From that time she came at his call, and sat upon one finger, the captain perching upon the ivy hard by to sit with his head upon one side, jealously watchful as to the safety of his mate. Meanwhile Judith chirped and preened her feathers, and fluttered her wings, passing pen by pen through her beak, at intervals telling in chirps how warm was her nest, and how beautiful the goggle-eyed, big-headed, long-necked sparrowkins had grown to be.

The tears often came into the prisoner's eyes as he stood there motionless, with one finger turned into a perch for the bird ; and then he would talk to it, and at last grow excited, and tremble for fear he should make any sharp movement and frighten the little feathery thing away.

"It all keeps me from going mad," was constantly on his tongue.

It was as far as he could reach to get his finger in through the hole in the nest, and, from paying a visit with it carefully at first, Range grew more daring. For some time the intrusion was resented by pecks, but the little bird grew used to it at length, and suffered him to stroke her head when she was brooding over her young.

That nest was for a long time Range's world, and it would occupy his thoughts sometimes for hours.

The captain made a serious outcry on the morning when, with a good deal of care, and some enlargement of the hole in the ragged nest, Range drew out one of Judith's sons or daughters, a little half-fledged, hideous-looking creature, with patches of ugly fluff sticking out here and there. He enjoyed a grim kind of satisfaction in seeing the little creature's ugliness.

The days glided on, and there was an incident to take his attention from the terrible monotony of his life.

One of the fledgelings came to grief. Probably, having too extensive a soul for its small body, it disobeyed its parents, became exceedingly enterprising, and shuffling itself out on to the edge of the nest, thence on to a stout ivy twig, it essayed to fly, and fluttered a little way down as Range watched it.

Alas! poor sparrowkin; its body was ill-balanced as its mind, for it suddenly toppled over, and fell plop on to the gravel-walk, where it was instantly seized by one of the solemn bull-dogs, who took it as if it were a pill, and then stood looking up blinking its eyes as if waiting for more.

Judith and the captain evinced not the slightest grief, but went on feeding the rest of their family, and displayed great jealousy of a white-breasted pair of martins, who gave Range days of delight as he watched them bring clay pellets, and build their wonderful bit of masonry beneath a spot where the eaves were clear of ivy.

The days glided on, and the seasons changed; and, though it seemed impossible, Range woke one day to the fact that his arm, which he still wore in a sling, was knitted firmly together; and with this knowledge came the determination once more to escape.

A low sigh startled him as he was sitting thinking of some means, but he did not turn his head.

"You there?" he said, quietly.

"Yes; I have not troubled you lately. I am here. Are you going to reproach me?"

"Not I! Why should I?"

Sarah Pannell sighed again, and something seemed to force Range to speak.

"What have I done that you should join in treating me like this?"

"What have you done?" she cried, scornfully. "Ask yourself!"

"I have; and the reply is that all was in innocency. Can you find pleasure in coming and gloating over my misery?"

"Yes!" she said, spitefully. "You are a contemptible wretch, and it does me good. It is a lesson to show me what a fool I was."

There was a pause.

"I think you did care for me," he said, "but not much, or your love would have been mingled with pity. See how I am humbled to speak to you as I do."

"Yes," she cried, scornfully. "It is to try and win me to your

side, and get you set free; but it is all a mistake. Your freedom will never come through me!"

She closed the wicket sharply, and walked away, to meet Shel-drake, who made her eyes flash at him as he gave her a curious look.

"Won't do," he said. "It is a partnership, my fair, and we must all share. Why, if I suspected——"

"What do you mean?" she said, indignantly.

"—You," he continued, "of wanting to elope with the golden gander, I should set Jack on the watch."

"Speak to me again—" she said—"speak to me again like that, and I say such words to Jack as shall make him treat you as he would a rat!"

She turned away, and went to her room to throw herself sobbing upon the bed.

But not for the words her husband's friend had spoken. Her sorrow was for the prisoner, at whose state she told herself that she rejoiced, but whose appeal had gone deeply, taking a deeper root than at the time she believed.

Some raging fires of revenge soon burn out, especially if lighted in a woman's breast.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

WHAT JUDITH SAW.

"THERE!" cried Judith, speaking in a high-pitched, excited manner, as Lady Fanshaw lay watching her with wild, half-closed eyes; "how tiresome! I've folded this note in half, and it ought to be in three to go into this envelope. I know, I'll run down and get one in the library."

"Yes: do," said Lady Fanshaw, wearily.

"You are tired, dear; good night! I won't worry you any more. You are sure you are no worse this evening?"

"Worse? No: better, far better! Good night, dear!"

"Good night! I'll direct the letter, and leave it in the hall, and it will be taken on first thing in the morning."

"In the morning?" said Lady Fanshaw, half rising from her couch as the horror of the coming day seemed suddenly to have grown terribly near.

"Yes, dear, to-morrow; why, you said that you were better to night?"

"Yes, yes, I am better, but tired. Good night, dear, good night!"

They embraced affectionately, and Lady Fanshaw uttered a moan of sympathy and pity as she saw the door close upon Judith, who, with her own features working, stood for a few moments outside, pressing note and envelope upon her labouring breast.

"Oh!" she cried at last; "I must be firm and womanly. I need all my strength now."

She ran down into the hall and entered the library, where a lamp half-turned down was burning.

She went in gently, knowing that sometimes Sir Harry came down there to sit thinking or dozing in the great reading-chair.

A low sigh told her that she was right: he was there now, and as she approached him softly—the thick Turkey carpet deadening her steps—she found that he was sleeping heavily.

There was enough light for her purpose; so, going softly to the table, she took a large envelope from the oaken case, directed it, blotted it, and slipped in the note. Then the adhesive flap was moistened upon her little red lips, and she was about to steal away when she noticed that she had not closed the great morocco blotter that bore Sir Harry's arms on the exterior; and, recalling her uncle's love of neatness in the handsome room, she took the little envelope from off the blotting-paper and thrust it into the front place in the oaken case, closed the blotter, stole out softly, and shut the door.

There was a table in the hall where letters were left ready to be sent in by the groom, who rode over to Brackley every morning; and here she laid her note, to stand looking at it for a few moments before—with a weary sigh—she sought her own room; to walk up and down for hours, thinking of the horrors of the coming day.

Utterly wearied at last, the poor girl sank into a chair to sit and think, and as her thoughts wandered she recalled how once before she had sat there with the intention of passing the night in wakefulness, so as to see Arthur Range that morning before he left; and all the while, as she shudderingly told herself, he was lying there in the wood, looking with appealing eyes to heaven—dead!

A burst of tears relieved her overwrought brain, and she sat thinking again till the room seemed hot and her face and brow burning with fever.

Extinguishing her light, she drew back the curtain and pulled up the blind, to gaze out at the dark night, and then softly raised the window and sat down, with the humid night-air cooling her heated brow.

She had not been there long before sounds on the left startled her, and she listened.

They were undoubtedly steps, and peering down in the direction she dimly made out two figures passing from one clump of trees to another.

While waiting and wondering as to what it could mean, there was another sound—this time upon her right.

It was the cautious opening of a window, and, though she could not see what followed, she could tell plainly enough that some one climbed out and descended by the broad trellis.

"George!" she exclaimed beneath her breath, and then for fully an hour as she sat listening there was no sound.

Should she go and wake her Uncle Robert? she asked herself. No, he would be too heavily asleep.

A second thought was that perhaps Uncle Harry was still in the library. Since Lady Fanshaw's illness he had often stayed there very late, and gone up and down several times perhaps after the rest of the house was asleep.

She hesitated for a few minutes, and then, overcome by the feeling that something was going forward that might militate against the next day's discovery, she stole out of her room and down the broad stairs to the library.

It was very dark in the great hall, and a strange shiver of dread assailed her as she softly felt her way along, till in the intense gloom she stood there like one who wakes suddenly from a fit of somnambulism, unable to make out the locality, and suffering from a confused state of mind that increased till it was almost unbearable.

Where was she?—fronting the library, dining-room, or drawing-room?

For some minutes she hardly dared to stir; but, mastering her weakness, she extended her hands, and at length found the door.

Again she hesitated; for a curious feeling of dread assailed her.

As if by a clairvoyance of a prophetic nature, she seemed to see within that closed portal a bent figure, with the face resting on the writing-table, and in an agony of horror she stood gazing at the dimly-illuminated scene. There was no light from the lamp, but still she could see the bending figure, indistinct as if a lambent vapour had been interposed; and with a faint cry she threw herself forward, to find her hands come in contact with the door.

For a moment she resisted, and then, ashamed of her dread, she threw open the door.

"Uncle!" she cried, in agonised tones; "are you ill?"

There was no response, no lambent light, no figure bent down over the writing-table. All was utterly dark and silent.

"Are you here, uncle?" she cried, in a voice more her own, but all was still; and after taking a few paces forward she went back and closed the door, satisfied that it was fancy, and determined to go back to her room and wait patiently for morning. It was too serious a business to alarm the house for what might have been as visionary as the picture she had conjured up in the library.

All the same though, when once more in her chamber, she went to the window to watch, and was rewarded by finding that all was not imagination; for she heard George Carleigh return as he had descended, even catching the noise made by a rose-thorn fastening upon his clothes.

Later on she fancied that she heard the two figures she had seen first return.

Then all was silent once more, and she sat sleepless and waiting till the first sharp chirp of a bird was heard; and as the grey dawn

began to peep call after call came from bush and tree. The morning-star shone bright and clear; but the more distant orbs were paling fast, and ere long there were a few orange flushes far up in the east. A soft, sweet air, too, was wafted over the garden, and familiar tree and shrub and flower-bed grew plainer and plainer, till the sun rose to glorify the whole, so solemn in its beauty that as Judith gazed the moisture gathered in her hot and weary eyes, which filled and overflowed. Then, as the tears ran down her sorrowful face, she held out her hands towards the lovely scene, and wondered how, in that world of beauty, such terrible things could be.

"What will to-day bring forth?" she said to herself, with a terrible agony at her heart.

The answer was close at hand—the long suspense, the despair, near their end; for the truth will have its way at last!

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

It was mid-day, and a group was standing down by the landslip in the little dell. The waters had been running muddy and discoloured for hours, and the little mound of earth and rock had been entirely removed by the two stout gardeners who had been wielding pick and shovel, while Sam Burton had lent a hand from time to time.

Sir Harry, Sir Robert, and the old American had jealously watched as earth and stones were thrown aside, masses of rock wedged open so that they could be lifted, and all in utter silence.

No other spectators were present, save one, and that a little large-eyed, watchful robin, that changed its place from time to time on twig or block of stone, always intent on what was going forward below.

Early in the morning Sir Robert had been touched upon the arm by Uncle Wash, who said significantly,

"He has not come down."

"No," was the reply, and Sir Robert glanced at his brother, who evidently discerned what was said, for his brows were knit, and he was very stern.

"He will come presently," Sir Harry said to himself, but the men toiled on, working at the spot that Uncle Wash had pointed out as being most likely, and Carleigh, whom they had seen at breakfast, remained away.

For without any hesitation Uncle Wash had stopped before the mass of fallen earth and had said,

"Dig here."

"Why there?" said Sir Harry, whose keen eyes read a change in Sam Burton's countenance.

"I'm an old goldseeker and handler of pick and shovel, Sir Harry Fanshaw," replied Uncle Wash, "and as a prospector I've got to know at a glance where earth has been moved and where it hasn't. It didn't do for gold-finders to waste time in the mountains digging where other men had dug before. I've looked all about here, and this spot is the only one where the earth has been moved for years."

"That's a true wurrud," assented Macpherson; "but this all slipped down with the wee bit hurricane here one night last August, eh, Sahm?"

Sam Burton nodded.

"Yes," said Uncle Wash, after a keen look round. "Loosened, Sir Harry, I should say, from above—to cover something that was laid down here in the stream. The water seems to have been dammed by it."

"Yes, you are quite right, sir," said Sir Harry coldly. "You wish the men to dig down here?"

"I do, sir," said Uncle Wash; and the men had toiled all through the morning to find, some distance down, some sodden fragments of cloth and a pair of shoes, the sight of which made the old American start and Sir Harry tremble.

"Well, sir," said the old man to him in a hard, cold voice, "what do you say now?"

Sir Harry gave him a horrified glance and turned away.

"Hold up, Harry, old fellow," whispered Sir Robert, grasping his hand, "for the honour of the house."

Sir Harry smiled faintly, and once more stood there stern and rigid, as the men toiled on till nearly mid-day, when they paused for a few minutes' rest, nothing more having rewarded their search.

They soon began again though, and with renewed eagerness, their curiosity as well as horror having been stimulated since they felt that they must be near the end of their task.

And now in a hopeless manner, and in obedience to his master's command, Sam Burton was working as hard as his weakness would allow, a strange sensation of excitement making him too eager to lay bare all they sought.

At last a quick ejaculation from the old Scotch gardener startled the lookers-on.

"Eh, here it is!" he cried. "Sir Harry, here's a mon under these stones!"

Sir Harry made no reply, but stood with his hands clenched, looking down at the men's work as they were now engaged in throwing out the pieces of rock.

Sir Robert drew a long breath, and wiped his streaming brow, and, for the first time, the old American showed signs of emotion, panting heavily, and then suddenly reeling.

He would have fallen but for Sir Robert's arm, to which he clung for a moment as he whispered—

"He left me just a year ago, so true and brave a lad, and——"

He could not finish his words, but stood looking from one to the other of the brothers with so pitiful an aspect that Sir Harry too was moved.

Just then, as if by one consent, the men stepped back from the hollow, into which the water had once more made its way, to run thickly for a minute or two, and then bright and clear in its old rocky bed.

Uncle Wash took a long breath, and, doffing his hat, he walked slowly forward to sink upon his knees by the stony edge.

As he did this he passed his hands across his eyes, to wipe away the tears that had not flowed since boyhood, and bent reverently down over the improvised grave.

His look was of an instant's duration, and then, as if galvanised, he sprang to his feet.

"It's not my boy!" he cried.

Sam Burton, who had been standing aside with his head averted, resting upon the handle of a spade, let it fall, and stepped to the edge to look down as if bewildered, and then stared helplessly from one to the other.

"What does this mean then?" cried Sir Harry excitedly.

"Sir Harry," exclaimed Burton, "it is—yes, I know. It's that old soldier chap—him as you helped that day. Yes—there."

The keeper stooped down and picked up something metallic-looking that had escaped from the rotten clothes; and, giving it a wash in the stream, he opened it, to find four sovereigns therein, and some remains of tobacco.

"Yes, it's him, I'll swear! I see him fill his pipe from out that box."

"Lay some boughs and stones across here, my lads," said Uncle Wash in a quiet, business-like tone. "Leave the rest till the police have been."

He looked at Sir Harry as he spoke, and the latter gave an assenting nod. Then the three turned to go back to the house.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

NEMESIS.

"I CANNOT see through the mystery here," said Sir Harry in a cold, stern voice.

"Nor I, sir," said Uncle Wash. "Seems I've been upon a wrong scent, but I don't think I was much to blame."

"I do not blame you, Mr. Range," said Sir Harry coldly. "It is a terrible affair though, an accident, I suppose. The poor fellow must have been poaching, and the great mass fell upon him. Instant death!"

"And a very careful burial afterwards," said Uncle Wash drily.

"What do you mean, sir?" cried Sir Harry sharply.

"Mean, Sir Harry Fanshaw? Why, that earth-slips and avalanches never lay a man out that way in the little bed of a stream."

"Oh, absurd!" cried Sir Harry indignantly.

"Just as you like, Sir Harry; but if I was crowner or jedge over this case I should want to know how long landslips had taken to wearing bottoms of cloth trousers and patent leather shoes."

"He is right, Harry," said Sir Robert quietly. "I'm afraid there has been murder here."

"Or a fight," said Uncle Wash, coolly, as he trudged on with knitted brows.

By this time they were in sight of the house, where the doctor's dog-cart was standing, and, as they hurried on, Sir Harry exclaimed—

"Surely it was an accident, Bob. But there, poor George is cleared."

He turned to Sir Robert, and said this last in a whisper.

"Well, why don't you answer?" he continued, pettishly. "I say George is cleared."

Sir Robert looked at him pityingly.

"Do you hear me?" repeated Sir Harry. "I say George is cleared."

"Then why did he stop away this morning?" replied Sir Robert.

"Ah, doctor!" cried Sir Harry. "You here! I'm glad you are."

"Yes, Sir Harry, I ran over directly I received Miss Nesbitt's note. Her ladyship is very nervous this morning."

"Note? I did not know."

"Indeed? It was a request to come over and see Lady Fanshaw, who is not quite so well to-day; but there is a restfulness about her that is a reassuring symptom."

"And there is no cause for uneasiness?"

"Decidedly not."

They had entered the hall, and Sir Harry laid his hand upon the doctor's arm.

"Come in here," he said, "I want your help and advice. Something urgent. Mr. Range, you will come in, too."

He led the way into the library, and then stopped short.

"George! You here?" he cried.

There was no reply.

Carleigh was bent forward over the writing-table with his forehead touching the blotter and his hands down by his side.

"George, are you asleep?" cried the General, catching him by the shoulder.

Softly and quickly the doctor went round to the other side, and, passing one hand under Carleigh's chest, he drew him away on the

easily-running library-chair, so that he could go down on one knee, and look in the bent-down face.

One glance was sufficient, and his brows knit.

"Murray!" exclaimed Sir Harry, piteously. "My poor boy!"

"Hush, Sir Harry!" said the doctor, gently. "It is too true! Stop a minute."

He bent down and took a letter from one of the clenched hands. From the appearance of the envelope the flap had been moistened and stuck down, but in a hurried manner, for it was all on one side, but now quite dry, as if hours had passed since the act was performed.

Sir Harry took the letter mechanically; and the small envelope was completely covered with characters in the captain's hand.

The letter trembled in his fingers as he saw the direction.

Across the top were the words:—

"By rail and special messenger."

Below:—

"MESSRS. HARTSDALE & Co., Bankers,

"Lang's Court, Charing Cross, London."

"Better open it and see, Harry," said Sir Robert, in a low voice.

Sir Harry took the penknife from the tray, slit open the envelope, and, taking out the contents, read:

"GENTLEMEN,—

"I may be in town to-night, and shall want the balance I have in your hands. I know it will be out of banking hours, but kindly oblige me by leaving some one at your office.

"Yours faithfully,

"GEO. CARLEIGH.

"MESSRS. HARTSDALE & Co."

"What is it?" said Sir Robert, as he took the letter and read it. "To-night!" he muttered to himself. "Flight!"

"But, doctor, can you do nothing?" exclaimed Sir Harry, who seemed to rouse himself as if from a state of stupor.

"Nothing, Sir Harry!"

"But what is it—a fit?"

The doctor shook his head.

"I don't see any traces about," he said, quietly; "but there is no doubt about the case: Captain Carleigh has died of poison!"

"Poison?" gasped Sir Harry.

"Yes; but whether self-administered or no a coroner's—"

Sir Robert and the old American exchanged glances. Then the former ran to his brother's side; for, with a bitter, reproachful glance at Uncle Wash, Sir Harry uttered a curious gasping sound, and fell backward in a fit.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE END OF A CLUE.

PLAIN enough to the reader, but a time of mystery and conjecture to all at Elmthorpe, where Uncle Wash stayed on, feeling sure that he should find there the clue to his nephew's disappearance.

It had been, too, a time of horror to those at the retired old mansion, where legal inquiries followed the events just recorded; and Sam Burton gave evidence of his suspicions respecting some one being hidden in the Wilderness, consequent upon the behaviour of his dog, and the discovery of the spirit-flask and the spade; but he said no more than was dragged out of him by a not very inquiring legal gentleman; and Lady Fanshaw's secret was safe with him and with her husband.

For as soon as he had well recovered consciousness she told him all, as she knelt humbly by his side, even while, motionless and cold, and beyond the power of working further ill, George Carleigh lay in his own room, dead—in the pit he had dugged for another. This secret died with him, none divining more than the fact that he had certain chemicals in a drawer in his own desk.

"Death by misadventure," the jury called it at the inquest; and it was as good a verdict as many that these sapient coroner-instructed councils return.

It was one day when, tempted by the lovely spring weather, Lady Fanshaw was slowly walking up and down the garden, weak and terribly wasted, but evidently on the high road to recovery, for there was a calm, restful look in her eyes as she leant heavily upon Sir Harry's arm, Judith was talking to Uncle Range about the inquiries he had afoot in town.

Sir Robert was letter-writing, so that conversation was interrupted between the old American and Judith, for a warm intimacy had sprung up, the old man consulting her in every step, and even at times going so far as to let off what he called a joke—a sort of verbal balloon, to, as he expressed it, see which way the wind blew.

"We shall find him at last," he was saying. "Now we've made that discovery down yonder my mind feels at rest."

"Oh, Mr. Range!" cried Judith, reproachfully.

"Well, I can't help it, my dear; but it do. I don't feel now that he's come to much harm."

"But this suspense is so dreadful, Mr. Range."

"Yes, my dear—to me," said the old man, drily, and with not so much as a twinkle in his eyes.

Judith sighed.

"The fact is, my dear, to speak plainly, you upset him so much that he's gone off somewhere to forget you."

"Then it's very cruel of him," cried Judith, passionately. "Don't you think it is, Mr. Range?"

"Ah, I'm an old bachelor as don't understand these sorter things, my dear; but I shouldn't hev thought it was."

"But it was."

"Ah, very well then, my dear, it was; and he has gone off to New Zealand or Siberia, or the North Pole with an expedition, and we shan't hear from him p'raps for years."

"But it seems so thoughtlessly cruel for him to fail to write to those who care for him all this time."

"Meaning me, of course, my dear," said Uncle Range. "I'm them as care for him."

"He ought to have written to you, Mr. Range."

"Well, you see, he did begin that letter to me; but it was cut off like before it was finished. Bless your little heart, my dear, he might just as well have written letters to a cinnamon bear as to me. I should never have written back."

"But you would have known what had become of him."

"Well, yes," said the old man, coolly; "but, do you know, I'm thinking that we need not worry ourselves about him any more."

"Oh, Mr. Range!"

"He's sure to turn up again some time—so don't you fret. It's very kind of you to have taken so much interest in him; but let it go now, for I'm 'bout settled in my own mind what's the cause of it all."

"You feel sure that you know?"

"Yes, my dear," said the old man, in his way. "Fact is—there's no doubt about it—he's gone off with some gal."

Judith started from him with her eyes flashing.

"How dare you?" she cried. "It's not true. You don't know your nephew, sir, or you would not bring against him such a shameful charge."

"What! About taking a fancy to some young lady, marrying her, and going for a long trip?"

"It is not true!" cried Judith again; and, darting an indignant look at the old man, she hurried into the house.

"Poor!" said the dry old fellow, laughing softly, without making a wrinkle in his face; "call herself poor? Why, the pretty little puss is as rich in all sorts of good things as a queen! My! how she sticks up for him! He's a lucky chap, my A. L. R.—that he is! Hallo! what's he signalling about?"

He walked slowly across the lawn, to where Sam Burton was standing with his gun under his arm and with a handsome dog, which looked furtively at the old American and then backed behind his master.

"One o' my Bess's pups, sir," said Sam, apologetically. "Young

'un I'm training. P'raps you wouldn't mind a walk in the woods this morning?"

"Nothing I should like better, keeper," said the old man; "my legs don't fit well under tables. I like being out among the trees."

"So do I, sir," said the keeper, as they walked on; and he grew quite chatty after his fashion, a certain amount of intimacy having sprung up between him and his master's guest.

"Well, Sam Burton," said Uncle Wash, turning upon him suddenly; "you haven't brought me out here for nothing. What is it?"

Sam hesitated and gave his head a rub after tilting his hat on one side; and then, as they were well out in the pine-wood, he stopped short.

"Well, sir," he said suddenly, "it's like this here. I like you, sir, same as I liked Mr. Arthur; and though you and I didn't get on at first——"

"That'll do, my lad," said Uncle Wash. "The finest thing in the world is to be a citizen of the United States; but, if I hadn't been born an A Murrycan, I should have liked to be a Yorkshireman."

"You would, sir?" said Sam.

"Yes, my lad. Of course, I see it all. You stuck up for your master and wanted to keep all that quiet because of the disgrace."

"Ay, sir, that weer it."

"And, of course, you were not taken with my queer ways. But, there! let that go. Now, then, what is it?"

"Well, it's this, sir: I was always a bit thick-headed about anything as hadn't to do wi' the birds and portchers, and that sort; and since I weer badly from my hurt I've been worse. It's been a sort o' feight in my yead, whether I should hurt the maister and my lady by talking about all I know'd; and so I hev been a bit closer than a might ha' been wi'out. Look here, sir: one day I weer out here wi' my Bess, and I fun here skretching and tewing and taving about just wheer you are standing, and at last she tore out this here from under the fir-pins just as you see."

He drew a handkerchief from out of one of the inner pockets of his shooting-jacket, leaned his gun up against a tree, and, going down on one knee, deliberately untied two or three knots, and displayed the little heap of Range's curly hair and beard.

The old man dropped upon his knees and examined the hair for a few moments, and then drew in a long breath.

"Tie it up again," he said quietly; and when this was done he rose and clapped the keeper on the shoulder, adding, "I ought to be a bit mad with you, my lad," he said; "for, if you'd give me that at first, it would have saved a lot o' trouble. But, there! you've spoke out at last. I see it all now."

"You do, sir? Well," said Sam, rubbing his ear, "it's been a'most too much for me. I never could get that hair to fit wi' what

weer down yonder, and when it weer all browt to light I couldn't mak' nowt of it then."

"Yew'll get five hundred pound for yew're wedding, Sam Burton, after all, and I dessay my boy will make it another. Here! give me that handkerchief. One of them hairs is the end of the clue I've been thinking out. I shall soon find him now."

He snatched the handkerchief from the keeper and went straight back to the house and into the library, where Sir Robert was, in good old-fashioned style, sealing up a large letter with wax and crest.

"I found him," cried Uncle Wash triumphantly, and in ignorance that Judith, who was ever on the watch for news, had seen him coming and followed him in.

"Found him?" cried Sir Robert, dropping the wax.

"Yes; it's all as plain as a pikestaff now. Why, we've been blind as bats."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Range," said Sir Robert; "but I dare say you're right."

"Oh, I might have known from the first. Trick, sir, by some of our chaps from over yonder. They've smelt his coin and followed him up. See here!"

He threw the handkerchief on the table and undid the knots.

"Well—that is some hair," said Uncle Robert.

"Yes, sir, his hair!—my boy's hair! Kidnapped and shut up somewhere till he pays."

"Oh!"

It was poor Judith who uttered a deep sigh as she stood with a horrified look in her eyes.

"Yew there, my dear? Never mind. You had to know. Good-bye, and bless you! Next time we meet I'll bring my boy."

But Judith caught him by the arm.

"I'm going, too!" she said quickly. "Uncle Robert, you must."

"Going? With me?" cried Uncle Wash.

"Yes!" cried Judith, excitedly. "I shall go. Now," she added, in a quick whisper, "unsay those wicked words, sir!"

"Wal, miss," said Uncle Wash broadly, "there is only one gal in the wide world for my boy, and that gal, my dear, is yew."

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE BEAUTY OF ADVERTISING.

No other hotel would suit Judith but the "*Grand*," where Range's portmanteau was lying, and here they had been for three weeks waiting in hope and despair for news.

"Yew see," said Uncle Wash, "this London's a place that takes the conceit out of a man. Out at home we talk about England being a bit of an island, and London just as if it was one of our

mighty cities; but when yew come to move about in it, my dear, there seems to be no beginning to it and no end."

"Ah! it's a big place," said Sir Robert.

"Big, sir, don't express it," said Uncle Wash. "I've been out and about ever since I come here; and, whenever I think I've seen about all of it, I keep finding that there's ever so much more. I'm beginning to think that there's a small bit o' country that yew call Yorkshire, and all the rest of England is London."

"But have you no news?" said Judith.

"Nary bit, my dear. These private detective chaps is very clever at talking and making inquiries; but they never seem to ask in the right spot. No wonder! London's a wonderful place, where yew might hide a thousand Arthur Lincoln Ranges away and no one be a bit the wiser. It's so big—yes, it is big!"

"Why not try Scotland Yard now?"

"Don't think it would be any good, sir; don't, indeed. It makes me that mad——"

"Stop!" cried Judith, suddenly. "Don't think me foolish, Mr. Range, but you said 'mad' just now."

"Right, my dear—mad; it does make me mad."

"It is only an idea of mine," said Judith. "That hair cut off," she continued, hesitatingly; "don't they—oh! I can't say it—people who are supposed to be mad?"

Uncle Wash gave the table a tremendous bang with his huge fist.

"If my time was to come over again I should like to be a woman—lady!" he cried. "That's as likely as can be. Excuse for keeping him shut up somewhere. We haven't tried that yet. I'm off!"

The next morning advertisements appeared in all the morning papers.

"FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD!"

"Missing.—A young gentleman about twenty-eight years of age, fair complexion, well built; speaks with slight American accent. Supposed to have been kidnapped and kept a prisoner in some private madhouse. Information to be given to Washington Range, Grand Hotel, Charing Cross, London, W.C."

"We shall find him now!" said Uncle Wash, folding the *Times* for Sir Robert to see that morning. "I haven't shown it to her."

Sir Robert nodded his satisfaction, and then breakfast was eaten; and Judith was looking forward to another weary day of waiting.

She was disappointed, for Uncle Wash had sprung a mine of whose power he was unaware till the post came in.

Five hundred pounds reward! It was a large sum; and there were a good many people who were anxious to win the prize. In fact, the letters came in by delivery after delivery, till the party in their private room looked at each other in dismay.

Not that they were allowed to read them in peace, for card after card was brought in.

First there were the private inquiry agents—gentlemen who made searches in cases of divorce, &c. These had already been set to work, but one after the other came a perfect regiment of these professional gentlemen seeking an interview, and promising success on the grounds that they all had been accustomed to lunacy cases.

"But this is not a lunacy case," burst in Judith, angrily.

"Precisely, ma'am—assumed lunacy. In fact I may say," continued one who may be taken as a type of the whole, "assumed lunacy has been my specialty, and, if the case is placed in my hands, you may rest assured that in a very few days the young gentleman will be restored to his friends."

Judith was for employing the professional gentlemen one by one, but Uncle Wash was not so eager.

"Very well," he said. "Find him, and here's five hundred pounds the day you bring him home."

"Thank you, yes, of course," said one man. "I must ask you, though, for a cheque for preliminary expenses. Sir, you may consider your relative found and restored to the bosom of his family."

"Find him, then," said Uncle Wash bluntly. "I've offered a good fee. No clue—no pay."

Judith looked troubled, and was ready to oppose this course, but Sir Robert sided with the American, and the private inquirers were bowed out.

"It isn't the money, my dear," said Uncle Wash. "I don't care how many thousand dollars it costs, but it's of no use to pay dollars away for nothing. If any of these fellows is worth a cent, he'll take the case up on spec. Those who are not worth a cent are of no use to us."

Then there were the letters.

The number of observant elderly ladies who knew where "that unfortunate young man was concealed" was astounding. They had always felt sure that there was some mystery about him since he was first brought to the house, and they had said so. Any one who had seen him go out with his keeper could tell in a moment, and all that was necessary was for the advertiser to come down to Blank Town, or such and such a suburb, of course bringing the money, and the suspense would be at an end.

Judith's eyes sparkled as she heard the first of these letters read. When she had heard the others written in a similar strain, she looked at Sir Robert in a puzzled way.

"No good, my dear," said the old gentleman, shaking his head.

"Guess not," said Uncle Wash in assent. "Seems as if we've only got to offer a big enough reward, and we can find anything we want."

Post after post brought in letters, and for hours and hours Judith and Uncle Wash read and destroyed some as absolutely useless,

made extracts, and dog-holed others as being worthy of further notice.

At the end of three days they found themselves with investigations to make that would, if fairly conducted, last them for three months.

For the man they sought was kept a prisoner in Scotland; in Jersey; in the north-west of Ireland; at an old manor near Cromer; down in Cornwall; at a lunatic asylum in Anglesea; in short, he was everywhere. There was no doubt about it—every correspondent had found him; and the only thing to settle was where to go first.

"What do you say, uncle, dear?" said Judith; "we ought not to waste time."

"No," said Robert; "so I say let's get back to Elmthorpe. We shall do no good in running after moonshine."

"Oh, uncle!" cried Judith, pitifully. "What do you think, Mr. Range?"

"No use to waste time and money over one of those letters," said the old man, shaking his head.

"But we must do something," said Judith. "It is such terrible work sitting here and knowing that he may be watching and waiting for us to come day after day."

"Let's have dinner," said Uncle Wash. "I can think better then."

Judith looked at the old man with horror and disgust as he crossed the room, but before he reached the bell the door opened, and the waiter, with a profound look of disgust upon his countenance, produced by the number of callers he had shown up, and letters he had brought, handed a card upon a salver.

"Reverend Frederick Farleigh," read Uncle Wash.

"Says his business is of great importance, sir."

"Show him up," cried Uncle Wash grimly. "Perhaps we may get some truth from a member of the Church."

The waiter withdrew, and a few minutes after returned to usher in the curate in charge.

He looked quickly round and bowed to Judith.

"Mr. Washington Range?" he said, quickly.

"That's me," said Uncle Wash. "Yew've come about the advertisement?" he continued, sharply, for he was hungry and exasperated by weariness and disappointment.

"Exactly."

"And yew've seen a gentleman somewhere who answers to the description?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, sir, we've got two hundred and fourteen who answer exactly to the description, and when we've seen all them we'll come and look at your man, but I don't think you'll get the reward."

"Reward!" cried the visitor, excitedly. "I want no reward. I can show you where Mr. Arthur Range, the gentleman who was staying at this hotel, is now detained."

"Here, stop!" cried Uncle Wash. "How did you know he stayed at this hotel?"

"He gave me his card," said the visitor. "For heaven's sake, gentlemen, don't treat the matter so cavalierly!"

"Oh! uncle—Mr. Range—pray listen to this gentleman!"

"You are Miss Nesbitt!" cried Farleigh, eagerly.

"Yes," said Judith, starting up.

"He begged me to write to you and Sir Robert Fanshaw."

"Then—hang it all, sir!" cried Sir Robert, starting up, "why the devil didn't you?"

"Because I was blinded by the specious representations of the men who are with him—his brothers."

"Brothers!" cried Uncle Wash. "Why, he never had no brother! Here, this will do. Where is he?"

"Not a dozen miles from here, gentlemen."

"You can take us to the place?"

"Certainly. You need not look doubtful. The poor fellow is kept prisoner. They declare he is a—is not in his right mind."

"I shall soon be not in my right mind!" cried Sir Robert, stamping to the bell, which he rang furiously.

It was answered directly.

"Here, put back our dinner for two hours," he cried. "Cab to the door at once! Now, Mr. Farleigh, are you ready? Shall we take a policeman?"

"I hardly think it will be necessary," was the reply. "You know how those are armed whose cause is just."

"Right!" cried Sir Robert. "No, no, my dear, not now."

"Yes, uncle, I must go to."

"No, my dear," said Uncle Wash. "This time we must go alone. There! you shall see us again to-night, and, please God! we won't come alone."

Judith gave way, for a sudden dread had assailed her. She had been all eagerness to help and discover Range; but now the discovery had been made, an intense desire came over her prompting a retreat. She wanted to get back to Elmthorpe. She could not meet Arthur Range. What would he think of her if he found that she had been so eager to trace him out?

Animated by these quite novel feelings she stood listening as the door closed, and then ran to the window to look out and see the little party enter a cab, which was driven quickly away.

"I s'p'ose," said Uncle Wash, "there'll be no need for me to use this."

He took a revolver from his pocket and examined the charges.

"Not the slightest, sir," said Sir Robert, rather stiffly. "We keep police here to do our fighting for us. All we have to do is to find out where our friend is, and the law will do the rest."

CHAPTER XC.

RANGE'S ARM IS STRONGER.

THE care of the prisoner had slightly relaxed on the strength of the broken arm, and, feeling this, Range determined to keep the rapidity of the mending as secret as he could, and made a point of not dispensing with the sling.

And now, in spite of his efforts, the monotony of his life was terrible. He found no relief in his birds; the clay-mill, with its plodding horses going round and round, seemed to madden him; and he dare not try to call the attention of the brickmakers: for twice over, when he had done so, they had collected beyond the wall to stand and brutally laugh at his aspect.

About every four or five days Sheldrake came up, sometimes to banter, sometimes to fiercely threaten. Generally he had papers with him ready for signature, but the result was always the same; he left the room with the words—

“Your petty cash is not nearly ended, Arthur, dear brother. We are very comfortable, and you will pay us our big stake yet.”

“Shall I pay them and put an end to it?” thought Range, one morning. “It is killing me.”

He sat gazing out of the window at the bright sunshine on the distant hills, and it seemed to him that, though all was miserable and dejected close at hand,—the brickfield harmonising well with his life,—he had only to take that one step and be free.

“No,” he said, rising; “it is not the money only. I said I would not give in, and I’ll escape yet. One of these days I shall get a chance.”

But the chance did not seem to come. Farleigh had been to see him twice and was most sympathetic, hearing all he had to say, and leaving him with the intention of writing to some of the friends he mentioned; but the conversation held afterwards with Sheldrake completely checked him—everything was so plain and straightforward and Mewburn so excellent an actor of his rôle.

The surgeon had long before ceased calling, highly satisfied with the promptitude with which his fees had been paid; for it was, he said, very thoughtful of the Reverend Frank Range towards a poor country practitioner with a large family.

The opportunity for escape came just when Range least expected it.

He was seated dejectedly by his open window one evening, when he heard Pannell and Mewburn chatting over a projected visit to the theatre.

It did not interest him in the least; for the sunshine in the west was sending a rich warm glow over the distant landscape, and he was thinking of how the trees used to look at Elnthorpe when he

was staying there. One scrubby fir-tree stood in the distance, and he was trying to magnify this into Sir Harry's glorious fir-woods, when he heard the familiar clang of the great iron gate, and soon afterwards he could hear Jane crooning over some old country ditty from round the corner below.

His musings were taking the line of how he had upset poor Jane, who had been by times distant and affectionate in her conduct, when he heard the sounds made by the opening doors; and Sheldrake entered the room, with a quiet, determined look that roused Range from his lethargy and made him turn a watchful eye upon his gaoler.

Sheldrake took a chair, threw himself into it, and lit a cigar; and, as he took out the case, Range caught sight of the handle of a little revolver, the rather unclerical weapon showing as he held open the breast-pocket of his coat.

"Have a cigar?" said Sheldrake, coolly; and he held out the case, but Range did not offer to take one.

"Just as you like. I want to talk to you. I made the boys stay down so that we could chat to ourselves."

"A lie!" thought Range, but he did not speak, only watched Sheldrake as he lit his cigar and threw the match out of the window.

"I've been thinking that with this fine summer weather coming on, and your arm getting well again and strong, how much better it would be to end this business. You must want a change, Arthur."

Range paced round with his arm in the sling.

"So you and I had better settle this business to-night. As I've told you a score of times before, you have only to write a letter to your agents, giving them certain orders, whose value you will never miss; and as soon as they are honoured, and you have given me a statement that all has been done of your free will, and that you have us to thank for our kindly treatment during your long mental illness——"

"Stamp myself, by my own act, as a madman?"

"Exactly."

"And open the way for any one to say I am not fit to have charge of my property?"

"Ye—es; only I shall keep the paper private, my dear boy. There, as I say, you have only to use your pen to this effect—half-an-hour will do it, Arthur, my dear fellow; and then, when everything is right to my satisfaction—our satisfaction—we'll shake hands; you shall thank me for the lesson I have given you, and you may go."

"Ha!" ejaculated Range.

"I see! You are longing for a change, so what do you say? Shall we settle the business now?"

"No!" said Range, quietly.

"You had better, my dear boy. I must confess that, in spite of

my exemplary patience, I am getting a bit weary; and your petty cash, which you entrusted to my care for your board, is all gone but the last hundred."

"You amuse me," said Range.

"Yes, I suppose so. It is surprising what trifles please gentlemen who are touched with a bit of insanity."

Range frowned.

"Suppose I decline?" he said once more.

"You won't decline. You've had enough of it."

"I shall decline."

"Wait a bit. Think it over first."

"I've thought it over for months, scoundrel!"

"Look here, Arthur Range. Every one about here thinks you mad, even your clerical friend, who is a poor weak sheep more than a shepherd. We can do what we like with you without interference, for, if it were necessary, the doctor who mended your arm so badly would give us a certificate directly to say that you are raving mad at times. Now, so far I've been patient; but I tell you this: unless you sign those papers at once I'll make your life such a purgatory that you shall wish yourself dead."

Range sat looking at him with a wild look in his eyes but he did not stir, though strange thoughts were rising, and a dangerous feeling was growing moment by moment.

"Up to now we've been patient and cool. You've been treated like a gentleman. Now, confound you," cried the scoundrel, furiously, "you shall lead such a dog's life as man never led before. A cellar and a chain and darkness—curse you. I'll tame your proud stomach; for the man isn't living who can get over me when I've set my mind on a thing."

"The others are out," thought Range, "and it is now man to man. I'll fight him with his own weapons—cunning and fraud."

"You daren't do that," he said aloud.

"Daren't? You idiot! One of your raving fits would be sufficient excuse. My good fellow, you don't know how easy it is to make a man seem mad in this country, and—you've found that out—the difference is very slight. Once a man is stamped lunatic he finds it as durable as tattooing."

"But you daren't do what you say."

"Ha! ha! ha! I dared to take possession of my dear brother's body when he was wasting his substance; and I have devoted myself to him, as the world about here knows, resigning an appointment, and giving up the lady to whom I was to be married, Arthur, because I dreaded the hereditary taint of insanity in our blood. Oh! it's an extremely beautiful story, and the people all believe it, your friend Farleigh included, who shed tears with me when I smoked a pipe with him the other night at his lodgings. They all say I'm such a good man."

Range sat down thinking.

"Bah! Throw it up, my lad. You don't want to starve in a cellar and be shown as a lunatic. You'll have more than you can spend where champagne bubbles, and bright eyes glance, and life is before you. Come, we've had enough of these weary months. You've shown pluck that has made me proud of you. There, throw up the sponge!"

"Give me one of those cigars."

"That's better," said Sheldrake, taking out his case, but giving Range a suspicious look, the result of his watchful nature. "There's a good one for you—prime weeds. Box of the best. Present from you."

He approached Range in apparently the most careless manner, but as ready as a tiger that suspects danger; and, as he bent down over his prisoner, he took hold of him by the upper part of the arm that was in a sling.

Range uttered a sharp cry, and Sheldrake started back, looking, with one hand in his breast, at the face before him, now white as ashes.

The cause was not pain, but excitement, as Range, with wrinkled brow, softly drew the sling aside, and set free his arm, drawing in his breath, and softly rubbing the place where Sheldrake's hand had been.

"I didn't know it was so tender still."

"Better directly," said Range, stooping and picking up the cigar that had fallen, and letting his injured arm swing loose and helpless as he bit off the cigar-end. "Give me a light."

"The big nerve from the shoulder is wrong, my lad. Soon come round," said Sheldrake, striking a light, and holding it for Range as the latter bent forward, his left hand guiding the cigar between his lips.

Puff, puff, puff, and the cigar being slowly turned round.

"Bone's getting pretty well strong again?" said Sheldrake.

"Quite, you dog!" roared Range, biting the cigar in two, so that one end fell, and he spat the other in his tormentor's face, seizing him at the same moment by the throat. "Quite; and I've not toiled to keep all my strength for nothing. It's my turn now!"

"Jack—Nathan!" shouted Sheldrake, struggling hard as he was driven back by the sudden assault.

"Call louder! They're in London!" said Range, through his teeth; and then, for a good ten minutes, there was a furious struggle; chairs were kicked aside, the table upset, and the heavy panting of two strong men was heard as they wrestled savagely.

But for his gymnastic exercises, Range must have been overcome. As it was he was thrown heavily, but he clung to his adversary; and when they struggled to their feet again the fight was continued here and there, till Sheldrake wrested one hand free, and thrust it into his breast, to drag out and cock his revolver.

The act gave him the advantage of possessing a deadly weapon,

but he had only one hand to keep his adversary at bay ; and quick as lightning Range threw the whole of his strength into the effort, tripped him, and threw him heavily, so that he went down with a tremendous crash.

Range paused for a moment to draw breath, and then, rushing to the door, he wrenched round the key, and threw the portal wide open.

"Freedom !" he panted to himself, as he saw the passage before him. Escape at last ! But just then there was an obstacle in the way in the shape of Sarah Pannell, who opened the further doors.

This was good and bad according as he could work it, and he tried to do his best.

He could easily have slammed to the door and rushed along the passage—his first impulse ; but he determined to master impulses, and do everything well, so as to be sure ; and hence it was that he stopped to tear out the key, and re-insert it with trembling hands.

"There !" he cried excitedly as he glanced at where Sheldrake was struggling up into a kneeling position ; "it is my turn now !"

It was not an easy thing to do, simple as it seemed—that thrusting back of the key into the lock ; for it seemed to fit badly and to catch here and there as a key will catch at times ; and so it was that, occupied as he was with this, he did not for the moment grasp Sheldrake's intention, nor realise his action, as he crouched upon one knee and rested his elbow as he took steady aim.

It was a matter of moments ; and then, as Range realised what was about to occur, there was a flash of flame, a puff of white smoke, and the whiz of a bullet as it sped on its way. The long passage echoed with the quick report, and then re-echoed, but this time to the sound of a heavy fall.

CHAPTER XCI.

NEWS FROM TOWN.

It was Sheldrake who fell back heavily, and at the same moment the door was banged and locked.

"Stand aside !" roared Range, as Sarah Pannell barred the way.

"Stop !" she cried fiercely. "You shall not pass."

"You often longed for one of my embraces, Sarah Pannell !" cried Range ; "now you shall have it ;" and, catching her in his arms, he swung her up and carried her for a few yards, struggling vainly, to the first room he passed, into which he thrust her, banging the door and turning the key, but in his excitement not noticing that the lock was broken.

"Arthur !" she shrieked ; "stay—stay !"

The words sounded muffled upon his ears as he ran to the stairs and bounded down to find Jane at the foot trembling and with her jaw dropped.

As she saw him rushing towards her she sank upon her knees.

"Don't! Please don't hurt me, Mr. Arthur!" she sobbed. "I do like you so!"

"Hush!" he panted, seizing a coat from the hall-stand and throwing it on; and, after hastily buttoning it over his white flannels, choosing a hat that fitted him. "Where are those dogs?"

"At the back, Mr. Arthur," she whimpered.

"Six o'clock," he muttered, as he glanced at a timepiece on the wall.

"Oh, please!" sobbed the girl.

"Go and quiet them. Stop: which is the key of the gate?"

She pointed speechlessly to where it hung.

"Now go and quiet the dogs. Good-bye! I'll never forget you for your kindness, Jane."

He hurried her off and heard her calling the dogs as he opened the front door. Then, forcing himself to be cool, he closed it after him, walked down the gravel-path and unlocked the great iron gate, through which he passed, and after locking it he tried to drag out the key, but it seemed to stick; for, in his excitement, he did not hold it straight.

There was no time to lose: and trusting that his aspect would not attract attention, and that he might get well on his way before the alarm was given, he walked sharply along the road.

He was drenched with perspiration and his heart was beating painfully; but there was no one to see—for the red house lay away from the main road,—and he had gone some hundred yards before he met a soul; and then it was only a couple of boys from the brickfield, who stared at him heavily and passed on.

What should he do—go straight to the police, or keep to the by-roads and make for London, where they would know him at the hotel?

Would they?

He might have time to make himself known before he was dragged away. At all events, that was the preferable thing; for he dared not go to the police-station, even if he had known the way, lest they should give him up to Sheldrake.

There was nothing for it but to walk, and——

Ha! he had it! His aspect was sure to take attention: he would hide till it was dark, and then continue his journey through the night.

But where to hide?

He looked in every direction and decided upon taking a narrow lane off to his left, which seemed to lead towards fields and trees. Perhaps he could reach some park or wood where he might hide for an hour or two.

There was but little choice; for in every other direction there were houses, and the village seemed to be very near where he was walking. So he made for the lane, turned down it quickly, and

stopped as if he had been stunned; for, not twenty yards away, coming hastily back from the station, were Mewburn and John Pannell.

They were talking eagerly, and for a moment or two did not see him, as, recovering himself, Range turned and began walking hastily back.

An ejaculation behind him told him that his immunity from danger was only momentary, for John Pannell had caught sight of the perfectly smooth nape beneath the hat; and, saying a hasty word to Mewburn, they increased their pace.

For a few moments Range forced himself to walk. Then, feeling that his only chance was to make a bold run for his liberty, he waited till he reached a gate, bounded over it, and took to the fields.

"Come on!" shouted Pannell; and the chase began.

For the first time for many years Arthur Range felt the sensation of being hunted. When quite a youth he and Uncle Wash had been pursued by Apache Indians; and the last part of the chase had been no tracking, but a run for life, in full sight of the enemy; but he had not suffered then the horror that he felt now as he blindly ran.

For a few minutes the pursuit was in silence; then, seeing how swiftly Range got over the ground, and that it was impossible to keep the affair quiet, Pannell shouted to some people ahead, long idleness having made him out of condition. He was losing ground.

For Range's retreat was a blind one. He could only run for the most open place ahead, and to his horror he found that he was being driven straight for a busy part.

He turned to the right,—and there were figures. He turned to the left,—and here were others, several of whom approached to cut him off.

He changed his direction again, and to his dismay he found that people were gathering from all parts—brickmakers, boys, labourers; and there were even women at the gate of one field.

"Stop him! Mad!"

It was John Pannell's voice, and Range bit his lip till the blood came, as he tore on, seeing that the cry was understood and caused quite an excitement—a dozen men at least coming running towards him.

There was only one hopeful sign—he could see the uniform of a policeman in the party. He might get help there. For he did not quite comprehend the eagerness of the crowd, nor understand that he was in a region where the insane form a large item in the population, and that now and then some poor creature who has escaped has to be hunted down.

One moment Range determined to surrender and appeal to the people. The next he felt that he was free, and that one thought made him determine to hold out.

"I may distance them," he muttered, with a fierce rage burning in his breast against the insensate creatures who were joining in the pursuit.

He was now in some park-like grounds, and fresh people, who looked like a couple of gardeners, had come from a gateway ahead.

"If I could reach that gate," thought Range, "I might distance them;" and, running towards a row of hurdles which divided the field from where some cows were grazing, he leaped the barrier easily; but his hat was not an exact fit, and it fell off, leaving his smooth bald head, that Mr. Gentles had shorn only a week before, exposed to view.

The increasing crew of pursuers uttered a shout; and, feeling that further attempts to destroy his identity were vain, Range threw off the overcoat, leaving himself free to run easily in his light flannels.

To his rage, the appearance of the strange white figure dashing across the field sent the cows nearly frantic. They set up their tails, and began a clumsy gallop which increased in pace as the pursuers grew more in number, cutting off the fugitive at every turn, till, mad with rage and despair at the pleasure his fellow-creatures seemed to find in hounding him down, Range tore on, trying to escape now by making for the houses.

It was a vain hope. He had nearly reached a gate opening on to the main road when a great hulking lad started forward, and threw out a leg, tripping the nearly exhausted fugitive and sending him headlong to the ground.

As he struggled up breathless and panting, his lip bleeding, and his eyes red with the hunted look glaring from them at first one and then another, he was the centre of a ring through which one of the constabulary elbowed his way, with a hand on the top of the staff at his side.

"Look out; he bites!" shouted some one, and there was a roar of laughter. "Look out, p'liceman!"

"Help!" panted Range. "Constable—the station—not mad!"

"Poor old chap, then!" cried the constable, speaking as if to some wild beast. "There, there, there!"

"Man!" shouted Range, "I tell you—sane as you are—protect me—from these people."

"Well, you don't look very right in the head," said the constable. "Eh! belongs to you, sir?"

"Yes—yes!" cried Sheldrake, coming up panting just at the same time as Pannell and Mewburn. Sheldrake's white neckcloth was torn off and his face bruised; but, though out of breath, he was coherent and ready to act his part.

"Thank heaven!" he exclaimed. "Oh, my poor fellow, how could you act like this?"

The crowd closed in. The real drama was interesting, and they gaped at the principal actors as Sheldrake turned to his confederates.

"He turned strange all at once as I was talking to him. Half killed me!"

The crowd shrank back a little.

"We met him making for the station," cried Mewburn; "and then, when he saw us, he turned and ran."

"Station-master wouldn't have give him a ticket," said a voice, and a laugh followed.

"Listen to me, constable!" cried Range, ignoring the crew around. "I claim to be taken under your protection. These men are American sharpers!"

"My dear Arthur, pray be calm," cried Sheldrake, imploringly.

"You would be sure of promotion if you exposed this conspiracy against a sane man. Take me to the station, and keep me there till I get help."

Sheldrake touched the constable's arm.

"Humour him," he whispered. "Get him home. A cart—a sovereign!"

"All right, sir," said the constable, in a low voice. Then, turning to Range—

"All right, sir, I'll drive you there. Come along o' me, and I'll take care of you."

"No!" cried Range, drawing back. "You see I am not mad. You have been plotting with that scoundrel to take me back. Help, all of you. I tell you I am no more mad than you."

He spoke quietly now, though under the influence of pent-up emotion; but no one stirred.

"Come along, sir," said the constable. "I tell you it's all right."

Range was trying to keep himself under control, but the idea of being in the power of these men again after this nearly successful struggle for freedom, was too much, and, with a bound, he overset two men, and made a dash for liberty.

Vain hope! There was a repetition of the hunt, but of very short duration, before he was overtaken, literally hemmed into a corner, to struggle fiercely for a few moments, and then, utterly exhausted, he carried to the nearest gate. There he was thrust into a cart, and held down, the policeman talking to him on the way, till the gates of the red house were reached, and he was carried in, to the disappointment of the little crowd, who, however, were furnished with ample funds to refresh themselves at one of the village inns.

"You had better stay, policeman," said Sheldrake, "and see that my poor brother is taken back to his room. Perhaps you will help us? Don't be hard upon him."

The constable did help, regardless of Range's prayers and expostulations, to come down after the prisoner was locked in his room, where he had again appealed to the man, who nodded, made promises, and descended to Sheldrake.

"Well?" said the latter, with a sad smile, "you have got him back?"

"Yes, sir; but what am I to do about this? You see, the gentleman talked so sensible like, I feel I ought to do something."

"Of course, constable; but that's the sad part. He is sane one

minute, but raving the next. Did he offer you a large sum to get him free?"

"Yes, sir."

"Said he was very rich?"

"Yes, sir; and that you had kidnapped him."

"Poor fellow!" sighed Sheldrake. "Did he tell you about his golden crown?"

"Well, no, sir; he didn't mention that."

"Ah, it is very sad. You'll take a glass of wine, constable?"

"Thankye, sir."

"Of course you will have to report this?" said Sheldrake, filling a glass. "Don't be too hard upon us for our treatment. I think even you would lock him up."

"Fact, sir," said the constable, emptying his glass, and buttoning up his coat, after slipping a sovereign into his pocket. "I've got to report it all to my inspector; but it seems to me, sir, you've done the right thing in 'pealing to the police. You're as easy with him as you can be. Good evening, gentlemen. Hope he won't get loose again."

As soon as the door had closed behind the man, Mewburn, who was all excitement, caught Sheldrake by the arm.

"The papers!" he cried.

"Papers?"

"Yes! Look here. Jack bought one at the station, and then we looked at them all. It's in every one."

Sheldrake caught at the sheet offered to him, and read it through, to stand directly after thinking.

"Yes," he said, quickly; "this night's affair and these advertisements finish the business. Jack, tell your wife to put a few trifles in a bag. No luggage, mind. Nathan, walk across to Dentford, and come back with a fly."

"But what——"

"But what, man? We're off to-night. We shall have the police on us in the morning, if not before!"

"But, my dear boy, the expense—the loss of all this furniture!"

"The loss of our prize and our liberty, you mean, fool! Off! Quick!"

Mewburn went off without a word.

"Now, Jack, collect any little valuables you want; never mind the trash! We'll make brother Arthur pay the rest. Curse him! he half killed me."

"What are you going to do?" growled Pannell, slowly.

"Collect papers, and get dear Arthur's physic ready. I shall want you to help me give him his dose."

An hour later, just as it was growing dusk, the fly drove up with Mewburn inside, and the gates rustled the evergreens as they were thrown open, with laurel and holly twigs thrust between the bars.

The fly was driven in, the wheels making that peculiar grating, grinding sound on the gravel, and the horse seemed to drive his iron-shod hoofs down into the soft carriage-way, as if it found it pleasant after the hard road.

Then there was the stoppage by the entrance; the driver got down, dragged the horse's nose-bag from beneath his seat, and strapped it on, the sapient animal making no objection to thrusting its muzzle far down into the dark oat-and-chaff trap within which it was to seek sustenance, while its driver was taken round to the kitchen to find, in bread and cheese and beer, the sop that would keep him good-tempered during the work in hand.

He was a dull, quiet man, without much to say, and a curious, ruminating look, as he sat over his crusts, and ground and ground, and stared at Jane, whose forehead wrinkled up as she stared back at him, and wondered what was to take place next.

The silence grew irksome at last, and Jane broke it by asking the ruminating, staring man if he would have some more ale.

He said he would—naturally; and he said he would again—naturally—when he was asked. This was the case the third time, and Jane was wondering how many glasses of ale a fly-driver could drink—a problem that has never yet been solved—when the man was summoned back to the fly.

He went unwillingly, and found his horse just as ready to be discontented at having his nose-bag taken off, an insult which he resented with a kind of snort. But time was on the wing, and the man found that they were nearer the start than he anticipated.

For on thrusting the nose-bag under the seat he saw that the fly door was closed, and that during his absence the patient, who was supposed to be going to see a great doctor up in London, was already in his place.

"I think that's about all," said Sheldrake, looking out of the window, where beyond him the driver just caught a glimpse of the sick patient lying back in a corner. "Keep the house carefully locked up, Jane, till we return."

"Yes, sir."

"And mind and close and lock the gates, Jane," said Sheldrake again. "Be careful, there's a good girl. That will do: go on, driver."

It seemed a curious business to Jane, that carrying off the patient; but her brain required time for anything fresh to soak into it and be taken up so as to form thought. Consequently she only stared at the dim figure of Range in the corner, and Sarah Pannell beside him, with Sheldrake and Mewburn in front, and John Pannell, tall and bulky, beside the fly-door.

Then the horse gave his head a toss, the wheels revolved, and the gravel emitted its soft grinding noise, till the gates were passed, and the fly stopped outside for John Pannell, who stayed to help secure the great gates.

"Ta-ta, Jane, my girl," he said, good-humouredly; "take care of my garden and the dogs."

"Yes, sir," said Jane; and then to herself with the quickness this time of dislike and injury, "and if I don't give 'em something they don't like my name ain't what it is."

She stood staring through the bars at Pannell, who climbed up on the seat beside the driver.

Then the fly was set in motion once more; and Arthur Range, again insensible to all that was taking place, was borne steadily away towards that great hiding-place the metropolis, to become for those who sought him like the proverbial needle in a bottle of hay.

CHAPTER XCII.

TOO LATE.

"HERE, you come along o' me, mates," said Isaac, and the two bull-dogs gave their peg-like stumps of tails a bit of a twitch right and left, and then began to sniff at the man's trousers, one going so far as to begin licking the bottom of a leg where there had been a splash of something connected with his trade.

"Yes, do take 'em away, Isaac; they howl and bark dreadful, and I'm afraid of them tearing me to pieces."

"I'd tear them to pieces if they did—wouldn't I, mates?"

The dogs looked up at him amiably: for there was something so meaty in the odour he exhaled that they were quite ready to make friends.

Here Jane uttered a sigh and sobbed as she raised her apron to her eyes.

"Oh! I say, come now, Jane, don't do that. I ain't a bit jealous, for he is a loony, you know."

"That I'm sure he is not."

"Yes, he is, old girl. Come, now, don't be hard on a fellow who's always been true to you."

"I never ast you to."

"No, but I have been all the same; and I've only got to set up in business on my own account, and there's a connection for me directly. Come, now, what do you say?"

"No!" cried Jane angrily. "I won't—I won't! And, oh! I say, go away, do; here they are!"

"I shan't go till you say yes."

"Then Mr. John will come and find you with the dogs."

"I don't care for Mr. John, big as he is. I was only going to feed the poor beggars."

"Oh! but do go."

"I shan't."

"You'll get me into no end of a row."

"Then you say yes, and I'll stop and stick up for you. I say, Jane, you know!"

The sound of wheels that the pair had heard was followed by the loud clang of the gate-bell, and the two dogs set up a deep baying noise.

"They'll half kill me. That Mr. Frank ain't a bit like a parson sometimes, and he quite scares me."

"He'd better mind what he's up to," growled Isaac. "He wouldn't scare me."

"Will you go? I must answer the bell."

"All right, then," said Isaac. "I'm off."

It was in the side-yard of the old house, just by the kitchen-entry, that this conversation took place, and the butcher slipped out of the door in the wall, leaving it ajar, while Jane hurried away to the gravel-walk to open the great iron gates.

"Why, it ain't them," she muttered, as she reached the end of the path.

"We want to see your master directly," said Farleigh sharply. "Open the gate."

Jane obeyed, and the three gentlemen pressed forward.

"Now, girl, don't stop," said Uncle Wash. "Lead on. Guess, Sir Robert, you'd best do a bit of sentry and scout."

"Master ain't at home, sir," said Jane.

"But we must see him at once!" cried Farleigh. "Where is Doctor Parkins?"

"He's out too, sir."

"Mr. John Range?"

"Yes, sir, he's out too, and missus; and they've took Mr. Arthur, too."

"Taken him?" cried Uncle Wash.

"Yes, sir; they had the fly night afore last, and Mr. Arthur was that bad after trying to get away again that Mr. John took and carried him down to the carriage."

"Where have they gone?"

"She don't know, sir," said a fresh voice; and Isaac came up.

"Who are you?" cried Sir Robert angrily.

"I'm her young man, sir."

"Don't you believe a word he says, sir," cried Jane angrily; "he ain't."

"Yes, I am, sir; I'm the butcher down here. Do you know Mr. Arthur—him as tried to get away again the other night, and they caught him in Palmer's medder?"

"I never heard of this," said Farleigh.

"He did, sir, all the same," said Isaac.

"Know him? Of course! We have come to take him away. Do you know where they've gone?"

"No, sir; only I think they've hooked it. Them dogs has been howling awful for something to eat, and Jane here had to siggle to

me as I went by in our cart, and I left her Jingle's mutton-chops ; for she'd got nothing to eat herself."

"Too late !" said Uncle Wash bitterly.

"Yes," said Farleigh ; "they must have seen the advertisement."

"That's so," said Uncle Wash. "Well, we've learnt something. They've been keeping him, pretending he's mad."

"There ! What did I tell you, Jane ?" struck in Isaac. "I always said he was all right."

"Had you seen him, then ?" said Uncle Wash.

"Had I seen him ?" cried Isaac in scornful tone. "Often. He used to make signs to me outer winder. It was me as made Jane here send him up the file, when he cut through the winder-bar and got out the night he broke his arm."

Uncle Wash and Sir Robert turned to Farleigh.

"Yes, that's quite correct," said the curate. "I saw him afterwards and felt that he was not insane ; but they somehow made it appear that he was."

"Well, now to trace the fly," said Uncle Wash. "They will not come back here. We can follow them now. It would most likely be the station-fly."

"No, it warn't," said Isaac sharply ; "it were a fly drove by a chap I used to know ; but I didn't think anything about it then."

"Never mind ; we've got some threads to work by."

"And you'll easy know him, sir ; for his head looks just like a baby's and smooth and round as a bagatelle-ball."

"Here ! let's see inside the house," cried Uncle Wash ; "we may find something to trace him by there."

Jane hesitated for a few moments and then led the way in, lit a lamp and a candle ; and on going through the house it was evident—from the state of the bed-rooms—that there had been a hasty packing-up for flight—only a few necessities having been taken, the rest left behind.

Lastly, they stood in the room that had been Range's prison ; but there was nothing to see but the traces of a severe struggle—chairs overturned, the table broken, and carpet torn up and lying in a heap.

Uncle Wash knitted his brow as he examined the doors and windows attentively.

"No," he said, "poor lad, he couldn't get out. They took care of that."

There was nothing more to be done in the house. The plan was to trace the fly ; and its occupants had had forty-eight hours' start.

"Please what had I better do, gentlemen ?" said Jane, looking from one to the other in a helpless way.

Each looked at her in turn and shook his head.

But there was an exception.

Isaac, after promising to follow the fly to the station and give all

the information he could about the driver he had seen on the night of the flight, slipped back to Jane.

"I'll tell you what to do," he whispered, grinning.

"Well, what?" said Jane anxiously.

"Say you'll have me, and then everything will come right."

CHAPTER XCIII.

NO. 9, RECKLEN STREET.

"I'm one o' that sort, my dear, that never gives up," said Uncle Wash, rather despondently. "I'm beat for the present, but we'll have him. Don't you fear about that."

"But it seems so hard," cried Judith, "to have got hold of the clue, and then for it to snap asunder as it did!"

"Yes, my dear; but we'll pick it up again, never you fear. I'll spend every penny I've got but what I'll have him!"

"It's a puzzler," said Sir Robert.

"Ah, it is, Colonel! You see, this place is so crowded up with houses there's no chance of looking out for a bit of sign; and it's always the same with the police—they've got information that they're following up, and when they get to the end they're blind leads!"

Three weary months had passed, and, in spite of every effort, not a scrap of knowledge could be obtained.

The village had been visited again and again, and Farleigh had been up constantly to see them; but the only news he had to impart was that the landlord had taken possession of the house and furniture, as his tenants had quite disappeared.

One day they had found the driver of the fly by the help of Isaac, who quite neglected his business in the keenness with which he took up the hunt; but the discovery was worthless, for the man had nothing to tell beyond the fact that he had driven the party to a little hotel in Surrey Street, where they had passed the night. They had left that hotel the next morning in a cab to see a doctor in Harley Street, and it must have been a long interview, for they had not since returned.

Sir Robert had taken apartments in Jermyn Street, and Sir Harry and Lady Fanshaw had stayed with them twice to see an eminent physician, who had done her ladyship an immense deal of good—so Sir Harry declared.

Perhaps he did, but there was another physician at work, beneath the touch of whose hand changes were being wrought in the sick woman's mind, which told more strongly upon Alice Fanshaw's bodily state than the best thought-out prescriptions of Doctor Royal.

It was, then, one evening after three months of weary search and

anxiety, when clue after clue had been taken up, and all had been in vain, that Sir Robert, Judith, and Uncle Wash were sitting moodily together, and the latter had declared himself to be "about beat."

"I'm beginning to think," he said, "that they've taken him out of the country. Gone back home, perhaps. I wish Arthur would give way and pay 'em and end it all. But he won't, sir!"

"Don't you think he will at last?"

"No, sir: he's that firm and obstinate that he'd die first."

Judith shivered.

"You see, he don't know, my dear, that you are trying to find him, or he'd pay ready enough."

Judith was too anxious of heart to put on any etiquette of retiring maidenism, and she said, sadly—

"I wish he'd give up everything."

"And so do I!"

"Gentleman to see you, sir," said the maid, bringing in a card.

"Farleigh!" exclaimed Sir Robert. "Show him in."

"You have some news, Mr. Farleigh!" cried Judith, running to meet the pale, breathless curate.

"Don't be excited," he cried; "perhaps it means nothing, but look here. Came by post this evening, and I ran up at once. It's Friday evening and service, but I've left that, and the people are waiting."

Judith snatched at the letter the curate offered with trembling fingers, and read, hastily:—

"Mr. Farleigh took great interest in his friend Mr. Arthur Range. He is requested to tell Mr. Range's friends that they will find what they seek at No. 9, Recklen Street, Gray's Inn Road. Some one must go at once."

"Let me look!" cried Uncle Wash. "Ha! Dated last night. Perhaps it may be only a plan to draw money; but we'll go and see at once."

It was of no avail to try and persuade Judith. She insisted on forming one of the party; and in half-an-hour the cab stopped at No. 9, in the gloomy, shabby street.

It was a large house, and the blinds were down, the blank, closed-eyed look of the place chilling the visitors as they took all in at a glance.

Even with raised blinds the aspect of the place would have been repelling, for it was terribly neglected. The windows had not been cleaned for years; it was a stranger to paint; and the area-railings were rough with rust and peeling scales.

The whole street looked forsaken and poverty-stricken, the houses for the most part having the doors wide open, and the door-posts ornamented with a column of bells, like organ-stops, telling the number of lodgers in each tenement.

Uncle Wash dismissed the cabman, for the children swarmed in the street, even gathering round to the neglect of their regular

pastimes, of which the neglected street and its well-worn pavement formed the play-ground.

A sharp rapping with the rusted knocker raised an echo in the house, but nothing followed as the sound died away, and there was no answer when the area bell was rung. It could be heard jangling somewhere below, and repetitions of the pull had no other result. Some more bell-pulls were on the door-post, but they only produced a wheezy, squealing sound of wires. That was all.

"There ain't nobody at home; they've all gone out," said a small old-looking child, who was carrying one nearly as big as herself, the task being so laborious that she was glad to sit down on the doorstep to rest while she looked up and talked to the visitors.

"Do you know who lives here?" said Farleigh.

"No. There ain't nobody at home; they've all gone out!"

"But somebody does live here?"

"Yes. There's three gentlemen and a lady. I thought you was them come back; but you ain't them. She's ever so much bigger than her. I live over the way."

"It is they!" cried Farleigh, and Judith clung to her uncle's arm; for the dingy house seemed to be swaying about, the little speaker to be looming large, and the baby she carried to be developing into a shawl-swathed goblin gloating over her pains.

"I don't think there's any one at home," said a policeman, stopping by the group.

"Constable," said Sir Robert, "we want to search this house at once."

"Have you the key, sir?"

"No; but——"

Sir Robert and Uncle Wash had a short colloquy with the man, whose aspect rapidly became wonderfully changed.

"I was told to keep an eye on the place, gentlemen," he said. "You'd better come on to the station at once."

"You go, Sir Robert," said Uncle Wash, sharply. "Any backway to these houses, constable?"

"No, sir."

"Then I'll do sentry till you come back. What, going to stay, my dear?" said Uncle Wash, quickly. "That's right."

For Judith had slipped her hand through his arm; and for the next quarter of an hour they had to stand and be stared at by a gathering crowd of children.

It was a relief when their party came back—the constable reinforced by an inspector and another of the force, who bore a bag from which, after a few trials, he produced a key which made the door fly open, and they stood in the dark, evil-smelling passage of the house.

Bad as it was, it seemed a relief to be out of sight of the little crowd gathering on the pavement, and to keep them in check one of the policemen was left outside, for some one had started the theory

that there had been a murder at number nine ; hence the spectators were augmenting fast.

"I'm 'bout sure he's here, officer," said Uncle Wash. "You've heard I've offered rewards to the man who finds him?"

"Oh, yes, sir, we've heard about the case ; but don't be too sure," replied the inspector. "Tom, open the first window you come to ! No, not there ; the people will be spiking their necks on the area-rails to stare in."

They had entered what had once been a good dining-room, to find it shabbily furnished, and the remains of a meal roughly spread upon the table. The back-room had been used for a sleeping-chamber, and here a window was thrown open to admit the air.

Then there was an ante-chamber, and what had been a study—a dark little room that had once possessed a stained-glass window.

"Nothing here," said the inspector. "Run downstairs and look at the kitchens and cellars, Tom."

The constable opened his bull's-eye lantern and went down with Uncle Wash, and kitchens, cellars, and cupboards were run through without result.

"Just as well to carry your work all before you, sir," said the inspector to Sir Robert. "We should only have been thinking that perhaps they were downstairs while we were searching up !"

The first floor had a few articles of furniture of the commonest, cheapest kind, and two of the rooms had been also used as bed-rooms, but evidently meant for temporary purposes ; for there were very few of the ordinary articles of use.

These rooms were soon examined, and so was the second floor ; for the three rooms here were bare and foul as some former occupant had left them.

"Only the garrets now," said the inspector, as they were making their way back to the landing. "Just run up, Tom. I dare say the lady won't care to go up there."

A dead silence fell upon the party ; for, just then, from overhead came a feeble knocking sound.

"By Jingo ! there's some one, after all," cried the inspector, whom the sound had, as it were, galvanised into a state of excitement.

Judith had stood with her fingers clasped for a moment, and then darted across the landing and then up the creaking stairs, followed rapidly by the others.

"Here ! here !" she cried, beating with her hands upon a door that was secured on the outside by a large padlock ; and, as excited now as the rest, the inspector held open the bag while his subordinate drew out an iron tool remarkably like the implement a burglar would have used for a similar purpose.

"Off with it, Tom," cried the inspector, whose mind was a good deal filled with the idea of the promised reward ; and after a few sharp wrenches a strong staple was torn out, and the padlock clanged against the time-stained door.

"Now, miss, please, I think I'd stop back while we go in first. It mightn't be——"

He was holding the door to; for Judith had pressed forward, half mad with excitement.

"Let me go!" she panted hoarsely. "I must—I must!"

She threw the door open, and went quickly into the long, low, sloping-ceiled room, half-darkened by an old blanket nailed across the window; but there was light enough for her to see him she sought, ghastly to look upon, with his sunken, staring eyes, stretched upon a paillasse on the floor, holding himself up to gaze at his rescuers, and then, as Judith rushed in, to fall back with a groan.

Friends and officials stopped short inside the room, as, with a wild cry, Judith threw herself upon her knees beside the ghastly-looking prisoner, and raised his head to hold it to her breast.

"They've killed him!" she cried. "Uncle! A doctor! Quick!"

Then, in a low piteous tone, as she clasped the attenuated form more closely to her—

"Oh, Arthur! My love! my love!"

CHAPTER XCIV.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

"CURSE him! Is he ever going to give in?" said Sheldrake. "I've a good mind to kill him."

"You've pretty well done it as it is," growled Pannell. "Poor wretch! it's too bad."

"Hadn't you better go and give information to the police, or has your wife done it already? She's soft enough on him."

"You leave her alone."

"Leave her alone? You'll get up some morning and find them gone off together."

"Look here, Shell," cried Pannell, in a voice full of suppressed passion and with menace in his look, "I don't want to hit out, because when I do I hit hard. This makes three times you've said that cowardly thing to me. Don't do it again."

"No, no; don't, Shell!" cried Mewburn. "Don't quarrel. Things are bad enough as it is. All this horrible expense, and we shall fail, after all."

"Not we; I don't fail in what I take up," cried Sheldrake fiercely.

"You'll fail here," said Pannell, "and I'm not going to have my wife stop in this cursed hole any longer."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I've taken rooms close by, where we can breathe."

"And what does Sarah say?" sneered Sheldrake.

"What I like in this case," growled Pannell. "I'm master when I like to be, and I'm master now."

"Isn't she coming back, then?"

"No."

"And are you going to stay away, too?" exclaimed Mewburn.

"Not likely, Nathan," replied the big fellow. "There! I'm going over to her now. I'll be back about three, and then you fellows can go out for a change. But look here, Shell, you've gone far enough. I won't have that poor fellow ill-used more."

Sheldrake did not speak till Pannell had left the miserable sitting-room and the front door had closed behind him.

"Curse him!" he cried, "he's getting too overbearing. I planned all this—didn't I, Nathan?"

"You did, Shell; but you see you've failed, and the expense——"

"It's a lie! I've not failed," cried Sheldrake. "What's that?"

He turned white as a loud knock was heard.

"It's all right—it's Jack," said Mewburn, rising to answer the door, Sheldrake following to listen.

"I've come back to tell you, Nathan," whispered Pannell, "the place is watched—that same policeman is here again."

The three confederates stood gazing at each other.

"What's to be done?" said Mewburn dolefully.

"What's to be done?" cried Sheldrake, with a sneer. "Is there no other spot in London but this? Be off, Jack, and don't come back," he cried peremptorily. "I'll come to you at your lodgings. Where are you?"

"Ninety-nine, Wilman Street."

"Right. Nathan and I will go and take another place. We'll get him away from here to-night."

Pannell nodded and went off, taking a roundabout route to reach his lodgings, for fear of being tracked; and an hour later Sheldrake and Mewburn followed.

"He's at the bottom of the street, Shell," whispered the latter, as Sheldrake was locking the door.

"Take it coolly!" was the reply; and, placing the key in his pocket, the pair strolled off.

Three hours later, when they returned to the end of the street, they saw a police-sergeant talking to one of his men at the door; and, after hesitating and feeling that they dare not risk it, the confederates went away.

"It's walking into the lion's jaws, Nathan," said Sheldrake grimly. "Wait till it's dark."

When night fell, first one and then the other went back; but there was always a policeman there, and they dared not make their attempt that night.

The next day the surveillance was closer; for there was suspicion in the Scotland Yard mind that coining was carried on at this house in Recklen Street; and, to make matters worse for the confederates,

they found now that they were watched as well, and it needed all their cunning to keep clear.

To get Range away was like inviting the capture of the whole party, and Sheldrake was half mad with rage. Three nights running he had engaged cabs in readiness to go up to the house; but the slightest movement in that direction resulted in the appearance of a constable; and he stood at last staring at his companions, ready to confess that it was checkmate.

It was the evening of the fourth day that John Pannell joined his wife in the little coffee-house that they had made their temporary home, the Wilman Street lodgings having been deemed unsafe.

"Look here, my girl!" he said hoarsely, "I can't stand this any longer. Here's all I've got left. You take it and look after yourself!"

"What are you going to do, Jack?"

"To do? Why, that poor wretch is starving to death in that attic, and I'm going to have him out and end all this! I wanted to be square to Shell and Nathan, but I've been cursing the whole business for months."

"Yes, it has been a bad affair," said the woman gloomily.

"Bad don't say it, my girl! Now, look here: you know what this means—don't you?"

She shook her head,

"Well, I shall either be taken by the police or Shell will put a revolver-bullet through my brains! So good-bye, old girl! You haven't been so warm to me as in the old days, but I've always been the same to you. Just think kindly of me if it comes to the worst; and, as to breaking with Shell and Nathan, there! it's like murder to go on, and I can't. Good-bye!"

"Jack!" she cried wildly, as she flung herself into his arms, "you shan't go! You shan't leave me! I haven't been kind to you as I should, but I'm going to change. There! my own husband once again!"

"No," he said softly, as he kissed her tenderly and tried to loosen her hold; "I must do it. You wouldn't have that poor fellow starve to death?"

"No," she said softly; "but it is not you who shall break faith. I wrote to his people last night; and, poor boy! he's safe by now!"

CHAPTER XCV.

"YES."

It was Lady Fanshaw who insisted upon going back to Elmhorne. Sir Harry had opposed her in his gentle, tender way; but she was so firm that he yielded, and they returned after a couple of months' travel on the Continent in company with Sir Robert and Judith, who

played the part of guides to two American friends, who did not require much persuasion to visit the old Priory once again.

A glorious afternoon,—one of those rich, mellow September days which made Uncle Wash declare England was not so very bad after all!

He was seated beneath one of the spreading trees with Sir Robert, who had been enjoying his afternoon hookah and had dropped asleep.

There was no one looking, as the old American satisfied himself, after a furtive look round and much listening, during which his large ears twitched in rather a wild animal fashion.

Satisfied of this, he softly extricated a steel box from his pocket, a knife from his vest, and, cutting off a piece of twist tobacco, thrust it into his mouth.

"That's better," he said, with a sigh of satisfaction. "That's the only thing I have again' grand society—a man can't have a good honest chew.

"And has to take his pleasure like by stealth," he added, after an enjoyable interval. "Ah! there they go—bless her! Makes a man wish he was young again—and Arthur Lincoln Range."

He needed re-naming: for the gentleman—he would have disowned the title—who was by Judith Nesbitt's side was very brown and foreign-looking with his closely-cut hair, which came down in a point above his forehead, while beard and moustache were of the same peculiar cut.

They were in deep conversation, which ceased as they came suddenly across Sir Harry and Lady Fanshaw upon one of the garden-seats.

Their approach was not heard, neither did they hear Sir Harry's low, husky voice; and it was as well, for he was speaking very earnestly.

"No," he was saying, "I will not hear one word from you. Why should I, dear wife? Are you not happy?"

"Happy?" she cried reproachfully. "Oh, yes; but it is always on my mind that I should humble myself to you to the very dust."

"My wife humbled? No," he said softly. "George Carleigh is dead, and with him died the past."

"And—oh! I hardly like to talk about it, Arthur—it makes me jealous."

"Then never a word will I speak again, I swear!"

"Oh! but I must know, dear! I could not bear not to know. But you shouldn't have let them love you. Two women! Oh, Arthur! how could you be so base?"

"Base?"

"No, I don't mean base," cried Judith hastily.

"I don't think it was my looks," he said, laughing. "But, there!

let it all go. It's like a nightmare; but I don't mind. I'd go through another year like that—I'd go through seven or even fourteen—like Jacob, to win my Rachel at last."

"Hush! Arthur; don't, pray don't talk like that!" she whispered. "I must know about that dreadful woman, though. You didn't love her?"

"No," he said. "How could I when you robbed me of the power?"

"And—and while you were at that dreadful house where I found you?"

"She was not so bitter and cruel there," he said, speaking frankly. "She was repentant and sorry, I am sure, for what I was suffering."

"Oh! Arthur, I don't quite like that!"

"But it moved her to write to get me set free. Judith, darling, I had been three days, as I told you, without food, and I believed I should have died."

"Arthur!" she whispered; and she clung to his arm.

"Well, you would have me tell you. There, now, let's talk of something else."

"But are you sure you never loved her—a bit?"

"Look in my eyes for the answer," he said. "Poor woman!" he continued, after Judith had obeyed and uttered a low, satisfied sigh; "I believe she and her great faithful St. Bernard dog of a husband stood between me and that scoundrel Sheldrake many a time. That fellow was like a disappointed fiend at last."

"Oh, Arthur, dear! you should have given up and paid them!"

"I would if I had known what I know now," he said tenderly; "but I was furious and mad."

"No, no—not mad, dear!"

"Not mad as some people call madness," he said, smiling; "but, there! I fought them, and I won."

"And won't they return?" asked Judith.

"No," he said grimly. "If I had them hunted down I should have to punish John Pannell and his wife, and I don't want to do that." He spoke so sternly that Judith watched him curiously for a few minutes.

"Now tell me about my other rival!"

"What! poor Jane?" he said, laughing. "Poor lass! She was out walking with that man the butcher, who tried to help me, and as soon as she saw me she burst out crying, and hoped I wouldn't be angry with her, because she said she'd promised to marry Isaac!"

"And were you very angry?" said Judith archly.

"Terribly," he said merrily. "I've told Isaac to get himself as good a business as he can, and that there's the money when—Oh! I hate to talk about money, Judith! Tell me—when is it to be?"

"I don't know," said Judith. "Alice will settle that. You men are so stupidly impatient!"

"Impatient? Judith, darling, say 'Yes!' for a month from now, or I shall go mad indeed!"

"The dressing-bell!" cried Sir Robert, starting from his nap. "Hallo! How happy the gipsy looks!"

The fact was—Judith had just said "Yes!"

THE END.

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